

FASHION *is* SPINACH

ELIZABETH HAWES

A FAMOUS AMERICAN
DRESS DESIGNER TELLS WHAT IS
WRONG WITH THE
FASHION RACKET--AND WHAT
WOMEN CAN DO ABOUT IT

A Random House Book

"Eat your broccoli, dear."

"I say it's spinach—and I say to hell with it."

— from a cartoon in the *New Yorker*

Fashion Is Spinach

By ELIZABETH HAWES

ELIZABETH HAWES is one of the best-known and most successful designers of smart women's clothes in America, and the undisputed leader of the small group of American designers who have challenged the style supremacy of Paris.

Miss Hawes' story is an adventure into every phase of the women's clothing industry, the second largest business in the United States. Her early struggles for recognition and her final leadership in helping to shift the center of the fashion industry from Paris to New York make a story that will appeal not only to the initiate, but to thousands besides—and to their husbands.



SOME OPINIONS

"Consumers attention! Elizabeth Hawes tells us that 'the deformed thief Fashion' steals the real value out of what we buy. She suggests a remedy. She makes a plea for functional and durable merchandise. Consumers want that too.

"Although *Fashion Is Spinach* deals exclusively with the clothing industry it has a wider application."

— ALINE DAVIS HAYS

President, League of Women Shoppers

"There are few enough books written by people who know what they are talking about. And few enough of those few which either make sense or, making sense, have the wit to hold the reader's interest through even a short summer evening. But Hawes' book on fashion is one. It is fun to read, exciting to think about. . . . She is a fiery, human little David taking a shot at that fantastic Goliath which is the fashion world—and plunking it right in its dreamy eye."

— RALPH INGERSOLL, *publisher, TIME*

"All the dirt on female fashions which nobody ought to know and everybody is actually panting for. No man will sleep well of nights for a week after reading the inside

continued on back flap





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Fashion Is Spinach



FASHION IS SPINACH

by Elizabeth Hawes



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"Eat your broccoli, dear."
"I say it's spinach—and I say to hell
with it."

I acknowledge with gratitude the help
Of Maria Leiper who asked for another book—
Of Harriette McLain who enabled Random House to print this book—
Of Kenneth White who believes in split infinitives—
All of whom made it possible for me to dedicate *Fashion Is Spinach*

TO
MADELEINE VIONNET
the great creator of style in France
AND TO
THE FUTURE DESIGNERS OF
MASS-PRODUCED CLOTHES
the world over

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PART I

THE FRENCH LEGEND

*"All beautiful clothes are made
in the houses of the French Couturières
and all women want them."*

1 . *The Deformed Thief, Fashion*



THERE are only two kinds of women in the world of clothing. One buys her clothes made-to-order, the other buys her clothes ready-made.

The made-to-order lady frequents Molyneux, Lanvin, Paquin, Chanel, in Paris. In New York she is deposited by

her chauffeur "on the Plaza," at the door of Bergdorf Goodman, or she threads through the traffic of Forty-ninth Street to Hattie Carnegie, less advantageously placed geographically but equally important where fashion is concerned. She may do her shopping out of the traffic, in a gray house on Sixty-seventh Street, Hawes, Inc., or just hit the edge of the mob at the Savoy-Plaza where Valentina holds sway.

In any case, the made-to-order lady can shop and dress to her entire satisfaction. Thousands of skilled craftsmen and women are ready to sew up her clothes. Tens of designers in London and Paris and New York and Los Angeles will work out her special sketches. Hundreds of salespeople are on tap at all hours of the day to watch over her fittings, advise her what not to buy, send shoppers to find that special color and material which really should be worn in her dining room.

She pays, yes. But it's worth it a thousand times. Her clothes are her own and correspond to her life as she understands it. She may spend hours fitting them, but in the end they are right.

Meanwhile, the ready-made lady shops. She too may want a special color to wear in her dining room. She may find that color after two weeks of hunting, or she may never find it, since very possibly "we are not using it this season." She may find a really warm and sturdy winter coat which will last her for the next six years and only cost \$35—or she may discover that the coat she bought last year is not in fashion this year, that the material was, after all, not all wool.

Millions and millions of women go shopping year after year. They are tall and short, fat and thin, gay and depressed. They may clothe their bodies for the simple purpose of keeping warm or not going naked. They may choose

their wardrobes with care for wintering in Palm Beach, or going to the races in Ascot. Their first necessary choice is, can they pay enough to get exactly what they want or are they at the mercy of mass production. Can they buy style—or must they buy fashion?

Lanvin and Chanel, Hawes and Valentina, are fundamentally occupied with selling style. The manufacturer and the department store are primarily occupied with selling fashion.

I don't know when the word fashion came into being, but it was an evil day. For thousands of years people got along with something called style and maybe, in another thousand, we'll go back to it.

Style is that thing which, being looked back upon after a century, gives you the fundamental feeling of a certain period in history. Style in Greece in 2000 B.C. was delicate outdoor architecture and the clothes which went with it. Style in the Renaissance was an elaborately carved stone cathedral and rich velvet, gold trimmed robes. Style doesn't change every month or every year. It only changes as often as there is a real change in the point of view and lives of the people for whom it is produced.

Style in 1937 may give you a functional house and comfortable clothes to wear in it. Style doesn't give a whoop whether your comfortable clothes are red or yellow or blue, or whether your bag matches your shoes. Style gives you shorts for tennis because they are practical. Style takes away the wasp-waisted corset when women get free and active.

If you are in a position to deal with a shop which makes your clothes specially for you, style is what you can have, the right clothes for your life in your epoch, uncompromisingly, at once.

On top of style there has arisen a strange and wonderful

creature called fashion. He got started at least as far back as the seventeenth century when a few smart people recognized him for what he was and is. "See'st thou not, I say, what a deformed thief this fashion is?" Mr. Shakespeare demanded in *Much Ado About Nothing*. But nobody paid any attention.

Now we have the advertising agency and the manufacturer, the department store and the fashion writer all here to tell us that the past, present, and future of clothing depends on fashion, ceaselessly changing.

Manufacturing clothes is the second largest business in the United States. Not one-half of one percent of the population can have its clothing made to order—or wants to for that matter.

This means that a large portion of \$2,656,242,000 changes hands annually under the eye of that thief, fashion, who becomes more and more deformed with practice. Fashion is a parasite on style. Without style, he wouldn't exist, but what he does to it is nobody's business.

Fashion is that horrid little man with an evil eye who tells you that your last winter's coat may be in perfect physical condition, but you can't wear it. You can't wear it because it has a belt and this year "we are not showing belts."

Fashion gets up those perfectly ghastly ideas, such as accessories should match, and proceeds to give you shoes, gloves, bag, and hat all in the same hideous shade of kelly green which he insists is chic this season whether it turns you yellow or not. Fashion is apt to insist one year that you are nobody if you wear flat heels, and then turn right around and throw thousands of them in your face.

Fashion persuades millions of women that comfort and good lines are not all they should ask in clothes. Fashion swings the female population this way and that through the

magic expression that "they" are wearing such and such this season and you must do likewise or be ostracized.

Fashion in America says that if Lady Abbington is wearing lace to the races, you should wear it to work in Macy's basement because you are afterwards going on to Coney Island. If "they" are wearing their hair cut close to their heads and waved over one eye, then you must, too. If you can't go to the hairdresser every day, that's just too bad.

One of the most fascinating things about the world of fashion is that practically no one knows who inhabits it or why it exists. There are a few people who know how it works, but they won't tell. So it just goes on, getting in deeper and deeper, until something like a war or depression slows it up from time to time. But once the war or the depression lets up, off again goes fashion on its mad way.

Some people seem to like it. There are a good many people who don't, but just accept it as inevitable, throwing away perfectly good old clothes and buying new ones every year. Now and then the public gets angry and writes letters to the press saying they simply won't wear long skirts, or short ones, as the case may be, but "they" pay very little attention. "They" just go ahead and change the fashion again and say you can't have blue or you must have brown.

"They" decide everything. "They" know whether it is to be pink or green this fall, whether it's to be short skirts, whether you can wear mink. For years everyone who thinks has gone around at one time or another trying to find out in a desultory sort of way who "they" are.

If they have any sense of humor, they must have a great deal of fun. Fancy how they must have laughed when they once got the last New York shop girl into afternoon clothes in the morning. One of their best stunts was putting all the

ladies into Eugenie hats one September, and then whipping them off when all those old feathers had been sold.

In the past they were able to decree that all Fifth Avenue was to be purple in a given week. If you didn't get a purple dress in those days, you were jailed. They got by so well with the color changes that a revulsion occurred in the public mind, and for a number of years they haven't really succeeded in putting across a solid wave of a single color.

They take inordinate pleasure in telling you your accessories must match and then putting out seven different shades of brown so you can spend two weeks finding the brown shoe that happens to go with your brown coat. They also love to take up "influences." Sometimes it's Chinese, other times Mexican. The game those seasons is to try and find the influence in anything but print.

Then, they improve things. The sight of a simple toweling bathrobe infuriates them. They put navy blue stars on it at once. Just as you resign yourself to the navy blue stars, they throw away that pattern and make all the toweling bathrobes with puffed sleeves.

The same group took away all those lovely white bathrooms and made them lavender, and have got out streamline gas stoves. They no sooner taught everyone to go out in low shoes and silk stockings in winter than they decided to try out high shoes again.

There have been rumors about that "they" are people like Greta Garbo, and Mrs. Harrison Williams, exotic theatrical stars and rich society ladies. But nobody can prove it. Greta Garbo is reported to wear whatever her designer chooses to put on her and it is exceedingly doubtful that she really expected everyone to wear sequin day dresses à la Mata Hari.

Mrs. Harrison Williams always appears to be having a

very good time in public and to be largely taken up with talking to her dinner partner. Possibly she lies awake nights worrying whether to turn all the world into a chiffon evening dress—or thinking up the newest color for next spring.

Are “they” really the French designers? At a large meeting of New York business women in fashion, Lucien Lelong was answering questions. “Monsieur Lelong,” a lady begged, “please tell us what colors will be smart next spring?” Monsieur Lelong politely replied, “I have a hundred shades of blue, a hundred shades of red, and so on. When I design a new collection, I just put my hand on the samples and take anyone that suits my fancy that day.”

Patou, when he was alive and successful around 1932, got out a whole collection of long-waisted dresses. Nobody else followed suit. Nobody bought them. He had to make another collection with natural waists.

There are the dress manufacturers on our Seventh Avenue in New York. Some say they are “they.” Some say those manufacturers just brutally decide they will put the waistlines up or down as suits their fancy. How did it happen then, in 1930, that the manufacturers on Seventh Avenue made a whole set of clothes with short skirts and suddenly found the skirts had got long while they weren’t looking?

So, a king gets crowned in England and everything must have ermine trimming. But you can’t find any ermine trimming in America that spring. I go to buy some oxfords with cuban heels—and find that they only come with one-inch heels. In 1929 leather-heeled oxfords were too heavy for any American woman to wear. That’s what Delman’s chic shoe shop said. By 1934, leather-heeled oxfords were all over the streets of New York.

I want a navy blue dress in the fall. It is only worn in the spring, the salesgirl says. I want a coat with no fur trimming

in the winter of 1930. All winter coats have fur trimming, the salesgirl says.

I want a brown turtle-necked sweater. I start at Macy's and slowly wend my way through Altman's and Best's and Lord and Taylor's and Saks' and Bonwit's. Finally I buy a white one at Fortnum and Mason and send it to be dyed. They say it won't dye, but it does.

I want a plain knit bathing suit with a skirt. They're all fancy knits this year and they have no skirts. I want a brassière and separate pants bathing suit. We don't have them any more. That was last year.

I want that kind of a bathing suit and I'm going right up and get one made to order by Valentina. I don't care if it does cost me \$200. But if I haven't got the \$200, must I take a printed challis bathing suit this year and like it? Just because they're wearing them on the Lido, what's that to me?

Why don't they ask me, a ready-made lady, what I want? Maybe they'd find out, to their horror, that all I want is a nice deep-crowned riding hat like the one I had ten years ago. Why don't they find out how much money I have to spend and what I really want to buy for it? Who got up this idea that just because one tenth of one percent of the population needs a certain kind of clothes, I want the same thing? Who decided that just because I was only paying \$10.75 for my dress I wanted a bow and a diamond clip added to the neck?

Fashion, my girl—he decided. He doesn't deal directly with you. He swipes ideas from style, embroiders them to cover up the fact that he left out half the material and only paid 75 cents a yard for the rest. He hires press agents and advertising men to assure you that the bright cellophane wrapper is what counts. Fashion gets \$50,000 a year for convincing you. His wife gets her clothes at Hattie Carnegie's, so why should he worry.

I, Elizabeth Hawes, have sold, stolen, and designed clothes in Paris. I have reported on Paris fashions for newspapers and magazines and department stores. I've worked with American buyers in Europe.

In America, I have built up my ivory tower on Sixty-seventh Street in New York. There I enjoy the privilege of making beautiful and expensive clothes to order for those who can afford my wares. I ran the show myself from the business angle for its first four years. I have designed, sold, and publicized my own clothes for nine years.

At the same time, in New York, I designed one year for a cheap wholesale dress house. I've designed bags, gloves, sweaters, hats, furs, and fabrics for manufacturers. I've worked on promotions of those articles with advertising agencies and department stores.

During the course of all this, I've become convinced that ninety-five percent of the business of fashion is a useless waste of time and energy as far as the public is concerned. It serves only to ball up the ready-made customers and make their lives miserable. The only useful purpose that changes in fashion can possibly have is to give a little additional gaiety to life. But by the time you've taken off fashion's bright cellophane wrapper, you usually find not only that fashion is no fun at all, but that even the utility of your purchase has been sacrificed.

Fashion is so shrouded in mystery, so far away and so foreign, so complicated, and so boring when you understand its ways, that it has become a complete anachronism in modern life. One good laugh, and the deformed thief would vanish into the past.

All my laughs are based entirely on my own work. I have done no research on any of the aspects of fashion except what

was necessary to a given job. I simply write what I have experienced—and none of the characters in this book are taken from anything but life.

2 . "Is God French?"



AMERICA has a habit of priding herself on being a land of big time promotion and publicity. Most Americans engaged in it have never stopped to consider that the really big press agents of the world are the French. They have built something up which has lasted not for a week or a month or a season, but for nearly a century.

There have been a good many books written about the French, how they think they are God, or "Dieu est-il Français," but the beauty of the French clothing business is that for decades nobody ever questioned its God-like quality. The build-up has been so perfect, so subtle and so unceasing that a legend is still accepted as reality by nearly the whole world.

One must give the French full credit for keeping their campaign on a very high level. They cannot be held responsible for what America has done to a once perfectly good idea. The French legend is a very simple one. All really beautiful clothes are designed in the houses of the French couturiers and all women want those clothes.

Properly speaking, a couturier or couturière, male or female of the species, is a person who creates clothes for individual women and maintains an establishment where those designs are sold directly to women and made to order. All important couturiers show at least two collections of clothes a year, spring and summer clothes in February, autumn and winter clothes in August or September.

Only the made-to-order lady goes to buy in such houses. She chooses the clothes she wants from a collection of seventy-five to two hundred dresses, coats, and suits of every description and for every occasion. The designs have been worked out and made on girls, mannequins, who afterward show them to the customers. The woman does not buy a design made specially or exclusively for her. What she buys may be sold to many other women.

In some cases, individual designs are worked out for a certain customer. This is rare, however, and usually only happens in the case of ceremonial clothes, weddings, coronations, theatrical performances.

It is quite difficult for Americans who have never shopped

in Europe to understand that, while each couturier makes clothes for every hour of the day and night, he makes only what he chooses for each occasion. Every real designer has his or her own interpretation of the style of the era. If Chanel does not like black satin, nobody can get black satin from her. If Chanel does not like full skirts, nobody can find one chez Chanel.

The customer who wants satin and full skirts will go, with Chanel's blessing, to another couturier who is using satin and making full skirts. Every European made-to-order shopper ultimately finds the couturier who suits her type and ideas. Sometimes a woman may go one place for her coats and suits, another for her evening clothes, but having finally settled on the designer or designers whose taste is most suitable, the made-to-order customer sticks.

In general, nothing but death can separate the made-to-order European woman from her chosen couturier. Her faith is based on the great tradition to which the Parisian couturiers belong.

The names of the French designers as individuals may die out within a generation, but there are always new ones to replace them. So far the newcomers have adequately filled the places of their dying predecessors. In their comings and their goings, they continue to work in a single pattern. Their business is that of dressmaking, great dressmaking, designing in fine fabrics and sewing fine seams. The pattern established by the French designers is followed by all couturiers the world over.

All that is necessary to be a French designer is that one work in France. This is a very important reason for the success of the great legend. The French believe in their souls that all dress designers are French, and work in Paris. They

make it easy to work in France, if you want to be a French designer.

If you're Norman Hartnell, and want to show clothes in Paris but go right back to England and keep on designing there afterward, then you can't find a place in Paris to show your clothes. You just can't make a lease.

If you're Elizabeth Hawes and some French fabric manufacturers are being very helpful to you, even practically keeping you in business through a depression, you will be asked by those manufacturers over and over again, "Why do you insist on being an American Designer?" They always say, "Why don't you work in France? It's so much easier to work there."

It is much easier to work there on individual clothes. Sometimes you wonder why you ever tried to work any place else. Everything is arranged for couturiers to work in Paris. So, among the French designers one finds Molyneux, who is French to the French, British to you. There is Schiaparelli, a great French designer, born Italian. There is Main Bocher, born in the U.S.A. And there are, of course, designers born and bred in France.

When you design in Paris, you know that everyone understands what you are trying to do and wants to help. That is, they understand what you're trying to do if you want to design beautiful clothes for the made-to-order European woman.

To begin with, time is no object. Wages of sewing girls are low and you can put as much work into a dress as you like. The price will still be within reason. It may take a girl a hundred hours to finish a garment. In 1925, she was paid about \$7.50 for her work.

Even more important than the price of her labor, the Parisian midinette, the sewing girl of the great tradition,

knows her business. She has been trained to sew beautifully and carefully. She is thousands strong in number.

Rent is fabulously low in the big city of artistic tradition. The mannequins who show the clothes depend more on their gentlemen friends than on the dressmakers for their living. The fabrics are wonderful and seductive in price as well as in design and color.

The handicraft background provides handweavers as well as handsewers. Some of the peasants around Lyons, in central France, still bend over their very old and rickety handlooms to turn out small lengths of intricate damask. Machines could do it, yes. But no machine can work out the first bit of new design.

Moreover, there is no necessity for having it done by machine. One day I suggested that some of those very desirable materials were too hideously expensive. "Couldn't you make them by machine?" I asked a French fabric man. I knew he could. They are sometimes made by machine in America, the design stolen from a hand-made pattern.

"Oh," said the fabric gentleman, "they would never be so beautiful." He painted a pastoral picture of the peasant milking his cow between weaving inches of the damask in question.

"Come on," said I, "you know perfectly well it can be done by machine."

"Well," he smiled gently, "it's still cheaper to have them made by hand."

The French standard of living for the working class has been notoriously low for generations. The generations which have made the great tradition of French fabrics and dress-making, the generations which have made possible the building of the great tradition, were still quietly carrying on in 1925 when I went to work in Paris.

They carried on with the buckles and the buttons, the flowers and other odds and ends which go into fine dresses. Any time you want a special buckle in France, someone will run it up for you. They don't have to make a die and cast a thousand of them.

One at a time, a yard at a time, a dress at a time, this is what is needed to carry on the great tradition. It is medieval, it is anachronistic, it is why all beautiful clothes are supposed to be made in France and all women are supposed to want them.

The whole French clothing industry, from the materials down to the last button, is run for the purpose of dressing women individually, to order. The designers are not only bred to do that, but they are urged to do only that.

The French have never tried very hard, or with any conviction to make cheap clothes in mass production. They design beautiful clothes for rich and beautiful women, and what the rest of the French population wears is of no importance. It is not only of no importance to the French designer, it is of no importance to anyone in the fashion world.

All those who have ever been in France know that the majority of women wear a tailored suit or a black dress and that's that. The entire French legend is built up on a few designers who design for a small group of a few hundred or possibly a few thousand women who are "chic."

There is no word in English for chic. Why should there be? Everything chic is by legend French. Perhaps everything chic is in reality French. The French invented chic and they keep it alive by what has come to be a very complicated machinery. It was not complicated when all women who wanted and could afford more clothing than enough to cover their bodies were the very rich and leisurely European population, plus a few ladies in the hinterland of America, Russia,

Argentina. It was not complicated before America swung into mass production.

We try very hard to have chic in America, but the ground is not fertile. We tried to substitute an English word, "smart." R. H. Macy took it right into the heart of our culture and decided it was "smart to be thrifty." That fixed that word. Nobody who knows anything about chic thinks you can have it and be thrifty. Nobody has ever seen a chic woman in thrifty \$29.50 clothes.

If you are chic, you have your hair done every day or two. Your nails are perfect. Your stockings scarcely last an evening. Your shoes are impeccable. Your jewelry is real and expensive. Your clothes are made to order and to fit. They are *your* clothes made in your colors and not one of a thousand machine-made copies. Your hats are *your* hats with the brims exactly the right width and bend.

Chic is a combination of style and fashion. To be really chic, a woman must have positive style, a positive way of living and acting and looking which is her own. To this she adds those endless trips to the hairdresser, facial lady, shoemaker and dressmaker. With infallible taste for her own problems, she chooses what is in her style and fashionable at the same time. If her style is not quite the fashion, the chic woman effects a compromise with the edge on the fashionable side.

Being chic was not only created "on the Continent" but it fundamentally can only flourish in that unhurried atmosphere. It takes a background of leisured people with secure bankrolls who don't have or want to worry about what's going on at the office, to produce chic and keep it alive. It takes large houses, in town and in country, with plenty of servants who run everything smoothly, without requiring too many orders.

The chic woman must have a lady's maid who worries

over what her lady looks like even more than my lady does herself. It is the maid, Marie, who says, "Madame really must buy some new hats. The little black felt in particular, of which Madame is so fond, is becoming just a trifle stretched on the left edge where Madame pulls it down over her eye. And the navy tailleur! Really Madame cannot wear it again. There is just the merest shine on the back of the skirt. Madame's net evening dress has a small tear in the skirt. I have mended it, but Madame will only care to wear it at home in the future."

Oh, to all the people who design and put together Madame's clothes, her lady's maid is of vital importance. It is Marie who will tell Madame, "The clothes which you bought last season at Adrienne's, Madame. I think you will not want to go there this season, really. The seams split on the sleeves every time Madame wore one of them. The black lace was definitely some old stuff which broke on the first wearing. I feel sure Madame can find what she likes at Dolneau where the workmanship is so excellent. I have never, Madame, had to repair one seam of a Dolneau frock."

She has never, perhaps, had to repair one seam of a Dolneau frock. Even if she has, Dolneau has repaid her. Marie gets a cut on everything that Madame buys in Paris. It is the prerogative of the lady's maid to pay the bills. She puts on her neat navy coat and small blue felt hat. She pulls up her sturdy cotton stockings and slips in to her old black purse a bunch of thousand franc notes which Madame gives her for the Dolneau clothes. She scuttles silently up to a certain desk in Dolneau's big house on the rue Royale. She hands over her high pile of franc notes.

She receives back a little pile of franc notes, her pay-off for liking Dolneau clothes. Maybe he pays her 10% and Adrienne only gave her 5%. Adrienne's clothes immedi-

ately burst at the seams, the hems fall out of them, the materials go into holes like magic. Madame will surely prefer to buy her clothes at Dolneau the next season.

Madame needn't worry about whether she has enough silk stockings, whether her lingerie is about to give out, what she is going to wear to lunch today. Marie will purchase the stockings, at a very good price from which, even so, she will be given her commission. Marie will call in the lingerie woman some morning, when Madame has nothing to do between twelve and one, so a new set can be ordered. Marie will make the important decision between the beige outfit with the olive green accessories and the simple black crêpe with the very small white edgings in which Madame looks so very very chic.

Madame's butler will run everything about the house so she never has to give it a thought. Madame's chauffeur will know by instinct the addresses where she wants to go to shop, for lunch, for the weekend.

And the husband of Madame will have time to go week-ending with her. He will not be too busy to run off to the south of France when it gets a bit rainy in Paris. He will have time to notice every new bag and belt and shoe she wears. He will go shopping with her and have long consultations with the saleslady.

"Madame's little gray tailleur of last spring was just a trifle too young for her," Monsieur will say. "I think that these very short skirts are not becoming to Madame. We must choose something just the merest bit more serious-minded this season. Cherie, vraiment, you know perfectly well that your legs are just a touch plump. Of course, I adore them, but in public I think we should have them covered just two inches lower down."

The hours consumed in getting just the right shoe to

complete each costume, and fitting that shoe and sending it back and fitting it again, seem a very pleasant way of spending time in Paris. The only other thing you must do that day is get dressed for dinner at nine. Next week you and Monsieur are going off to the little country place in Normandy for a rest anyway.

Chic, chic, it rests on the craftspeople, the servants, the time, and the money which Monsieur has inherited, or found somewhere. Maybe he works just a little. Maybe Madame came from Pittsburgh with a fortune in coal mines. He will love her legs which are a little too fat, and she will love to be a countess.

It doesn't cost too much in Europe, what with the coal mines and the wages one pays. The ladies' maid gets \$20 a month plus her commissions. The butler doesn't get much more. There's plenty left for the Rolls Royce and the small villa of forty rooms in Cannes. It's a wonderful life. The food is superb, the wine better. The sun is warm when it should be and the snow is on the Alps if Madame wants to ski.

The main problem of the chic life is having the right clothes to wear in the temperature one happens to prefer at the time. In June you must have special clothes for London and Ascot. In January you find yourself setting out for the Lido, with the proper nakedness to catch the sun. You may have to get some shooting togs for October in Scotland, and there are the proper evening clothes for playing roulette in Biarritz in March.

And Madame is attractive. No one, however jealous of her leisurely life, could dare to deny it. Sometimes she gets too fat or too thin. Sometimes she has nerves and develops wrinkles. But all of these things can be kept in shape by massage, facials, doctors, and what not. A group of chic women, beautifully dressed, in perfect taste for the occasion, clean

and well-groomed, are about as seductive a picture as the heart could wish.

They are perfectly sure of themselves, and their position, their clothes and their friends. They are photographed and written about. They are built up. The great French legend rests lightly on their lovely white or sun-tanned shoulders.

The French couturier knows and understands these women—and no other women. He creates the major part of their chic, supplemented as it is by accessories and all that goes into being well-groomed.

All beautiful clothes are designed in the houses of the French couturiers and all women want those clothes. You can read it in the newspapers. You can read it in the magazines. Your best friend will tell you so.

Once chic existed innocently enough, the natural result of French dressmaking and the leisurely life. Everyone accepted it quietly as the normal thing for those who could have it. It is simply the expensively fashionable angle of real style.

What the thief, fashion, did to it is of vital interest to the American public. Armed with the tools of mass production, aided by the advertising man and the promotion expert, abetted by a wild prosperity, fashion has used the French legend for his own scheming ends.



3 . I Was Nurtured in It



FOR the first twenty-four years of my life, I believed in the French legend. Like most middle- and upper-class young people, I was nurtured in it before I ever heard of the clothing business in general or designing in particular.

My maternal grandfather was the vice-president of a

couple of railroads and, as such, sufficiently affluent to send his two children abroad to polish off their educations. His son, my uncle Fred, studied architecture in Paris and lived in France for several years.

My mother was a very independent young woman. Although the head of her New York finishing school didn't think it was "proper," she went to Vassar in the gay nineties. She subsequently traveled and lived in France, bicycling about the shores of the Mediterranean in long flowing skirts. She won tennis championships in those same proper clothes.

Finally she consented to settle down to married life in Ridgewood, New Jersey, a town her father and uncle had largely owned in the eighties. Her trousseau, most of which is still extant in the family attic, was made in Paris.

My earliest recollections of my own clothes hinge on my "Paris dress." I had one a year for some time, brought back from the annual pilgrimage of my grandmother to the land of art and chic. The dresses were always white, batiste or piqué, and covered with hand-embroidered eyelets, scallops and blue satin sashes. They invariably had short sleeves and low necks and I was forced to wear guimpes under them in the winter. A guimpe is a sort of shirtwaist with long sleeves and a high neck. I loathed guimpes.

I also was greatly disgusted by being made to wear long-legged underwear to dancing school. It made bumps on my ankles and deeply offended my sense of chic.

As a reaction I took to dressing kewpies exclusively in hats. A later hangover shows up from time to time in the winter. I have a decided tendency to go out on the coldest nights clad in one chiffon evening dress and an elbow-length velvet cape.

However, in spite of being too well clothed for any aesthetic pleasure in the winters, my childhood passed off quite

painlessly. I spent hours on the kewpies' millinery, and more hours making dolls' clothes. Mother was an early Montessori addict of modern education and that included being taught to do all sorts of handicrafts. I made dozens of reed and raffia baskets and literally miles of beadwork. The beadwork took me on occasional trips to the Museum of Natural History for designs.

My grandfather died before I was born and apparently the excess money just gradually dwindled away. My grandmother's annual trips to Paris and the resulting clothes ceased quietly. My father and mother produced four children, of which I was the second, born on December 16, 1903. We had an average middle-class existence in a commuter's town about twenty-five miles from New York.

By the time there were four children, we bulged out of the corners of a shingle house which was always going to have an addition but never did. We had a rather nice small wood, behind the house, where we played. Across the sidewalkless street there was a big potato patch, on my grandmother's place, which was always going to be a tennis court, but never got there. There were several brooks within easy playing distance.

In the backyard, our playhouse was an old wireless cabin off one of the Southern Pacific ships. My father was an assistant manager in that company. We had a big vegetable garden and small flower gardens, one for each child. There were the usual sandboxes, slides, and trapezes spread around a mossy backyard. The grass never would grow because there were so many oak trees the soil was shaded and sour.

Mother, with a taste for the finer materials and workmanship in clothes and not much to buy them with, took to having our things made in the house. Our shopping expeditions to town consisted in biannual trips to Alexander's to

buy shoes, followed by rummaging over remnant counters for wonderful material. Then we walked by the windows of nice expensive French-importing shops and mother made sketches on bits of paper. This was always followed by lunch at Henri's or Maillard's and once a year a trip to the Hippodrome, once a trip to the circus, finally occasional theaters. My first theater was "The Blue Bird" and I still remember quite well the color of one blue stage set.

The dressmaker would come for a week at a time and, with patterns and sketches, run up our clothes. We were my older sister, myself, four years younger than she, my little sister, four years younger than I, and a brother two years younger than she.

By the time I was nine or ten, I took to sewing my own clothes. When I was twelve, I went into dressmaking professionally. First I made a few clothes for younger children, daughters of mother's friends. The drive was entirely economic. I always wanted to buy something, beads for the beadwork, material for another dress, Christmas presents.

A Mrs. Drinker in Ridgewood made really very charming and beautiful clothes for her young daughter and also for a little shop in Haverford, Pennsylvania. She regarded my sewing activities with interest and some amusement and offered to try and sell some of my things to the shop. It was called the Greenaway Shop, I remember.

I designed and made up a couple of gingham dresses and one of unbleached muslin with appliqué embroidery for ages three to five which she sent to the shop. They were priced about \$2.50 each. The material probably cost a dollar. The shop re-ordered on the muslin dress, four of them in different sizes.

There my professional dressmaking activity ceased for a while. I graduated from grade school and went on to the

high school. Social and school life took up all my time except for making my own clothes. I designed and made all of them from then on and on and on forever, except for occasional lapses in France later.

I used *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* freely, copying sketches or changing them. This further enforced the French legend on my mind. All beautiful clothes were designed in France and all women, including myself, wanted them.

How I escaped going to art school instead of Vassar, I don't know exactly. I made a slight move in the art school direction but the family tradition for Vassar was strong. My older sister was there, following in mother's footsteps. There was no fuss about whether or not I was going. I was a good student and passed my comprehensives without any trouble.

My first year at Vassar was marked by nothing much in particular. My sister was a senior and had a good many men for weekends. I tried to fall in with the same plan. It worked with fair success until the end of that year when I lost the beau I had kept hanging over from high school. He went to Williams and, after having me to one house party, outgrew me. I was quite unattractive and as I became progressively more serious-minded during the next three years, I had fewer and fewer boy-friends.

Freshman year I was the assistant on costumes for the annual outdoor play. I don't think I designed anything. The play was "Kismet" and my recollection is that I simply worked out the sketches of the girl who was my boss.

After having my appendix out that summer, 1922, I went back for sophomore year and discovered economics. I never paid much attention to anything else at Vassar after that. I took the required things, mathematics and chemistry always netted me A's. The literature and art courses I elected bored me and I got B. The economics, such as they were, fas-

minated me. They included not only the law of supply and demand, but Labor Problems, The Family, Socialism, finally Advanced Economic Theory. Senior year I spent four long months in the library reading every word ever spoken or written by Ramsay MacDonald and rewrote it all into a thesis on which I did not one ray of individual thinking—but I got A.

Outside the economics classes, I concentrated on clothes. At the end of sophomore year, I went to Parson's School of Fine and Applied Arts in New York for a six weeks' course. I learned a very important thing, namely that no art school, however satisfactory to others, was ever going to teach me how to design clothes. We kept going to the Metropolitan Museum and taking down Coptic designs which we transformed painstakingly into colored plates. Then we took bits of the designs and made them into or onto supposedly modern clothes. We took life drawing but no one ever mentioned anatomy to me as a student of dress design. Apparently it did not occur to them that I was going to dress living human beings who had bones and muscles.

I finished all my assignments in no time and spent hours posing for the advanced students. During the other hours, spent on the subway and train between Ridgewood and upper Broadway, I decided I'd better learn how clothes were made.

The next summer, 1924, through a friend who bought clothes at Bergdorf Goodman, I was able to go into their workroom as an apprentice, unpaid. I got to work at eight-thirty every morning. I got home about seven-thirty every night. We worked on the top floor with skylights letting in all the mid-summer sun. I was so tired I cried every night when I got home. I learned how expensive clothes were made to order.

The French imports came into Bergdorf's before I left that summer. There again were those beautiful clothes which legend assured us could only be designed in France. I decided I'd better go to France and find out what it was all about.

The last college year, '24-'25, was spent half on Ramsay MacDonald, half on how I was to get to France. First I tried to graduate in the middle of the year. I had enough credits. The Dean decided just at that point that one was only capable of doing advanced work after three and a half years at Vassar and that no diploma should be given out before the end of four full years. So I descended to the basement of the library and lived through the last semester with my liberal laborite.

The reason I wanted to graduate six months in advance was to have the extra money for going to France. If I'd had any sense, I would have just left. As it was, I faced an economic problem of no mean proportion, considering the fact that I had exactly \$25 a month for everything including clothes.

I tried for a scholarship and muffed it for a very simple reason. I went with my best girl friend to a dance at a prep school. It was all done to please her little boy cousin. We were damned if we were going to take off one of our precious four weekends. At Vassar in those days we were only allowed to leave the college four weekends in every semester.

So we went to the dance without signing out. When we got there, the whole freshman class was there from Vassar—also without signing up. They all went right back and confessed their crime. We maintained silence until someone sent an anonymous letter telling all to the head warden.

The authorities called us in and said they never paid any attention to anonymous letters but that we might just as well confess. We did. I didn't get any scholarship.

However, I got to work and began to design clothes for my friends. I used a dressmaker nearby for sewing them up. I finally got into a dress shop on the edge of the campus and designed clothes for it. Those clothes were made in a factory in Poughkeepsie and sold quite well.

I put ads in the Vassar paper to the effect that I had worked at Bergdorf Goodman and was ready to do anything for anybody. I made a few hundred dollars on commission from the shop.

When I told my French teacher I was going to work in France, she just laughed. My French was so bad, I'd dropped it after Freshman year. I went back to it senior year and took a frightful course in advanced French composition which proved quite a boon in writing and made my grammar fairly accurate. My accent was, and remains, perfectly awful.

Then everyone joined hands and told me very plainly that I could never get a job in France. They seemed to just know it by instinct. France, they insisted, was for the French.

Bonwit Teller at that time had an employment bureau. I can't imagine why. They probably got promising young people into the store that way. They made an endeavor to help get college people any sort of job. They gave me a letter to their Paris office.

One of my friends at Vassar, Evelyn Johnson, had left at the end of her junior year. Her mother was married to a French perfume importer and spent every summer in France. Evelyn decided to go to Paris with me when I sailed after college. She thought her mother might help me to get a job.

I had a few harassed moments in the late spring between economics and clothes. After all the time I had spent on labor problems, plus Bergdorf's workroom, I began to have vague humanitarian impulses toward saving the world somehow.

My mother, I might add, had been saving various situations all her life. First she kept saving the family finances by dealing in family real estate and dabbling around the stock market. Then she had always saved the entire Negro population of Ridgewood from being thrown out of their houses, jailed for drunkenness, or starved to death from lack of work. Most of them had been our servants at one time or another. She worked for years on the board of education and in county politics. Anyone who wanted to know anything about anything in Ridgewood always called up mother. One night a gentleman called up and said, "Mrs. Hawes, what shall I do? Someone is dumping garbage on the lot next to my house." Of course, mother told him what to do.

It is necessary to understand, however, that she never told me what to do. When I announced my intention of going to work in Paris, she said, "How long are you going to stay?"

Obviously I come naturally by a desire to save humanity. Fortunately, my economics teacher of the moment listened to my wailing around about whether or not it was really the proper thing to devote my life to the matter of clothes. She convinced me without too much difficulty that I might as well take the gifts and desires that God had given me and save a portion of the population from wearing anything but Hawes' designs.

Finally the spring of 1925 got over. We received our diplomas. We went home. I made a few clothes and prepared to sail the first part of July. And I had my first newspaper interview.

A woman on the *Newark News* decided that, since mother was so prominent in our county, I should be interviewed. It was a sort of brave-young-girl-just-starting-out-in-the-world story with quite a nice picture. It brought results.

A young advertising lady in a department store in

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, wrote me a letter and asked if I wouldn't like to report her some news from Paris which she could use in ads. I think it was to come out to about \$15 a month. I responded "yes" very loud.

That gave me another thought. I repaired to the local paper and asked them if they wouldn't like me to write them something regular from Paris. They said, "Yes, about \$10 worth a month."

So Evelyn Johnson and I sailed for France, July 8, 1925, student third class on the *Berengaria*. I was not seasick and learned to do my first drinking on that voyage. I had three hundred dollars and a diamond ring. It had been one of my grandmother's earrings. The family had it set and said I could always pawn it to get home. I still have it.

4 · *Copping, a Fancy Name.*



BEFORE the big docks were built, the harbor at Cherbourg was the very nicest place to land in France for the first time. You were taken off your big boat and put onto a tug which sidled into such a pleasant, small, inefficient world. The porters screamed and lost your baggage while you slowly

digested the low, whitish houses, red tile roofs topped by long "Tonique" signs, backed by small green hills.

We landed on the fourteenth of July. I felt as if I'd gotten home after all those years. The fourteenth being what it is, the one big national free-for-all fête, our train took fourteen hours getting from Cherbourg to Paris. Ordinarily it takes about five. It seemed the engineer got off at every town to dance in the streets or something.

I loved it. I always relax the minute I hit the French shore. I knew then, as I do every time, that there just isn't any hurry. I know now, as I didn't know then, that the food will be good at every little inn, the wine lovely and the beds divine. I like the land and the people in France. If I had been born French, I would be very happy about it every morning. I wasn't born French so I finally had to come home and be an American, after much had happened. I didn't go to France because it was beautiful and peaceful and full of good food. I went to learn about chic. I learned plenty.

We installed ourselves in a cheap Parisian pension, Evelyn and I. We shopped with our girl-friends and I penetrated those gigantic dressmaking places, the homes of the French couturiers, for the first time. The other girls bought clothes while I watched and felt quite terrified at finally being right in the middle of all chic. I was so scared I didn't really see much, just very large rooms and very smooth salesladies, very thick carpets and very beautiful clothes.

We'd go afterward and have enormous lunches with fifty-four kinds of hors d'oeuvres and wonderful cheese. Then we'd ride in carriages through the Bois, down long, long lanes of trees. I never got used to the idea that a forest should exist without any underbrush, even on the edge of Paris. We had our tea in some treesy place and rather hurried the driver back to the Ritz bar.

There the boys who'd just graduated from Princeton and Yale and Harvard and the whole United States bought drinks for us. "Double Alexandres" I learned to drink at that point. Once after we'd all had three double Alexandres, which I, personally, thought was the name of the drink, we ordered another round. The waiter looked at us very hard and said, "Do you want a *double* Alexandre—or just a single Alexandre?"

After a few days, I presented myself at Bonwit Teller's Paris office. The head man, French and fat and shiny, said he didn't know. I might come back a little later.

I didn't have time to be discouraged at all, because Evelyn's mother turned up right away from America. She whipped me around to her dressmaker and muttered a few brief and well-chosen sentences. I was hired. I didn't know for what money or what labor or what kind of place it was, but I had the job. I was to come sometime after the fifteenth of August.

Evelyn and I packed up and went along to Evian on the Lake of Geneva with her family. They had a regulation French villa, red brick, white stone trim, gravel walks, too much furniture. I was so preoccupied with getting back to my job and wondering about it that I recall very little of the visit.

We motored over the Alps a bit. They are a little too high and mighty for my peace of mind. We tried very hard to read *Ulysses* and I failed. We went into Geneva and saw where Mr. Wilson had saved the world for Democracy. I thought it was very wonderful. The French were more skeptical.

Finally the middle of August came around and we scampered back to Paris. Evelyn got a trousseau and went home

to be married, I went to work. My place of business turned out to be a copy house.

A copy house is a small dressmaking establishment where one buys copies of the dresses put out by the important retail designers. The exactitude of the copy varies with the price, which varies with the amount of perfection any given copy house sees fit to attain. A really perfect copy of a model costs in a copy house just about half what it cost in the place where it was born.

I am sure that wherever important couturiers have flourished in sufficient numbers to warrant attention, there have been copy houses. Certainly when I was in Paris in 1925 there were plenty of them, and they still continue on their illegitimate way.

Since the depression, the large houses in Paris have lowered their prices and have driven a number of copyists out of existence. The whole matter is of interest, both because it still exists in Paris and because, if retail designers ever rise to any sort of eminence and numbers in New York, we will have our copy houses too. They already exist but are not very virile.

Copying, a fancy name for stealing, is also interesting as an example of what a curious and rather degraded business dressmaking may be. The passion which has been created for being chic leads to almost any thing, probably including murder.

Most copy houses in Paris are upstairs, on side streets, although the one in which I worked was on Faubourg St. Honoré, just a bit up from Lanvin near the Place Beauvais. It was a very good copy house. Our boast was that we never made a copy of any dress of which we hadn't had the original actually in our hands.

The front entrance was through one of those perfectly

usual heavy stone-rimmed doors, into a dark and reasonably unclean hall, up a winding stair to a door which bore a brass plate marked with the name of the house, call it Doret. There was a door-bell.

The back entrance was on through the first floor hall, across a rather dirty court, up a very narrow and definitely dirty flight of stairs to a door with no name on it. That door led to the stockroom. The back stairs continued up to a floor of workrooms, and above that to a kitchen and small dining room where everyone except the actual sewing girls ate lunch together, when there was time to eat lunch.

The house was supposed to be closed from twelve to two for lunch. If a customer was in at twelve, we were stuck until she left. If there was no customer, the front door was locked at twelve, and the loud clarion voice of Madame Doret, resounded through the place, "A table!"

We had very good substantial food, soup, rabbit stew, salad and cheese. There was plenty of red wine and chunks of bread. Monsieur Doret, the only man in the place, was master of the table. He always wore a cigarette stuck behind his ear for lunch, and spoke in Montmartre argot, that low-down slang which one is not taught at Vassar. It took me a good two months to get to the point of following the luncheon conversation.

Copy houses are not chic in interior decoration. They are in business for the sole purpose of underselling the designers from whom they steal their wares. Our main entrance was usually unlocked, but there was a gong attached to the door so that nobody could sneak in without our knowing it. When there was any suspicion of an approaching raid, the front door was locked. One rang for admittance. Sometimes we answered the bell. If we actually expected a raid, we just didn't. All the old customers knew how to get in by the rear

entrance and when the copy-house-seeking police were on the rampage, we didn't want any new clients.

If the customer got in, she entered a small hall with a dingy carpet, walked past a tiny office on the left which was used by the salespeople and the sketcher and, in times of great rush, as a fitting room. On the right was a large office where Monsieur Doret plied his nefarious trade of keeping a double set of books. It appears to me to be especially a French characteristic, not in any sense limited to the dress business, to hate to pay taxes.

Monsieur Doret made a great point of doing all transactions in cash. Although the set-up did not indicate any great amount of profit, it was he, rather than any of my rich American friends, who got the Bankers Trust to open an account for me in which I kept a couple of dollars a month. I gathered he had both a dollar and a franc account there and they respected him.

In Monsieur Doret's office hung such model dresses as we kept to show. There were very few of them. We sold mostly from sketches. The models were not copies. They represented our "front." At the beginning of every season we ran up a few boring little sport dresses for show.

My job was selling Americans who didn't speak French—also bringing customers, if possible. I improved my sketching a bit and helped with that. The hours were nine to whenever you got through, around six, and I received the munificent salary of 500 francs a month, about \$20 in 1925.

If a customer arrived without any introduction, or if we suspected her integrity, we showed her our own models and bowed her out. If we knew her, or her introduction was good, we took her into a small salon which contained one large table, a useless fireplace, a dilapidated rug, four or five badly painted imitation Louis XV chairs.

We then got together whatever authentic copies we had, mostly dresses in the process of being made for other customers. We pieced out with the sketch books and made our sales.

Madame Doret was the brains and energy of it all. She had worked in the business under another woman who finally retired and left it to her and Monsieur. She was little, about five feet three, with wonderful legs and feet. Her hair was curly and brown, and her eyes very bright and black. She never walked. She had a sort of abbreviated run which got her everywhere at once. She spent most of her time making lists in the stockroom, and dashing out to see important customers. Her appointments were usually after five, at which time she shut herself up in the salon with a batch of foreign men, or an odd French woman. Out of this we always received a new set of models.

The house was closed for July and half of August. This was to give us a vacation, but primarily to give Lanvin and Vionnet, Chanel and the rest time to get their collections together so we could copy them. I went to work the fifteenth of August, 1925. There were practically no models but they began to appear. By September first we had a nice collection of fifty or sixty perfect copies, exact material, exact color, exact embroidery.

I never got any satisfactory answers as to how they got there, but after a few months I became sufficiently trusted to become embroiled in the business of stealing. It wasn't considered stealing. It was just business. Lots of people wanted Chanel's clothes who couldn't afford them, and we filled the gap.

I discovered, to my great surprise, that we actually bought models. I discovered this because I was sent to buy them. I was American and young and unsuspected. When it became

pretty sure that there was a particularly good dress somewhere, and we were not going to be able to get it free, or half price, or by any of the other hooks and crooks which I finally learned, we bought it.

The dress was described to me in detail and usually I was given the number. I then repaired to the couturier's in question, and either used the vendeuse of a friend, or just was very American and had never been to Paris before. If the dress was for an older woman, I bought for my mother, whose measures I had, and to whom I was taking the dress. If it was young enough, I had it made and fitted on me.

I think not more than four or five models a season were bought that way. But there was one more thing to be done at the couturier's. The embroidery men always came around to us with the embroidery for certain dresses from the big houses, particularly Callot, who was successful still. I would go and look up those dresses and see how they were made, if possible. With the exact embroidery, and my sketch, our model turned out pretty authentic.

So where did the rest of the clothes come from? Three major sources: customers, mistresses, and foreign buyers. I don't know how many years it takes a copy house to get the sources, but ours were both good and plentiful.

Some of the richer customers were women who bought a good many clothes directly from the designer. They then filled in their wardrobes chez the bootlegger. They liked the bootlegger and they let her copy their clothes in return for which they probably paid even larger prices, but still only half the price of an original. Perhaps some of them did get really low prices. The matter of price is seldom a fixed one in any dressmaking establishment, bootleg or not.

It made me very proud to have tea at the Ritz and see our customers in their Chaneles, exactly like the real Chaneles

across the table. One of the wonderful things about the chic monde in Paris seemed to me to be their fantastic desire to all have the same dress. In those days, it was always black. It was not smart to be economical, so if you had a copy, it really had to be perfect. We dressed some of the really chic women. Their return favors probably gave us a quarter of our models.

Half of the models came through foreign buyers. This always seemed to me a rather sordid business. I do not know, but I assume, that we paid out some money for the privilege of copying the models. I really felt like a thief the day I discovered how that worked.

I knew that many of the big couturiers delivered clothes just exactly in time to make certain boats, or they tried to. I always thought it was because they were busy with orders. What they really try to do is prevent leaks. But they don't succeed. Some of the better copy houses are run by people who work, or have worked, in resident buying offices. The supply of models is thus assured.

It was during the mid-season showings in November that I was initiated into the mystery of the resident buyer and the copy house. All manufacturers or stores who buy in Paris work through their resident buying offices which attend to everything for them. The resident buyer and his staff arrange for tickets to the openings, attend the home-office buyers hand and foot, day and night, while they are in town, and subsequently receive and ship the purchases to America or wherever.

One of our most frequent visitors, the only one who was ever invited to lunch, was a resident buyer for a large American manufacturer. Madame Ellis was an American who had lived abroad for years. She was about fifty-five, exceedingly attractive, and pretty smart. Anything she lacked in brains

she had fully made up for in experience. She seldom got any clothes from us, and I never saw her bring anything into the place. She was obviously an old and trusted friend of the management, and spent a good many weekends at the Doret country place.

I had a very large beaver coat. A fur coat in Paris is quite a rarity among the working class. Mine turned out to have a special value. I was requested to don it one day in November and go to the resident buying office through which Madame Ellis worked. It was toward the end of the mid-season buying, the day before a large boat was to sail.

The buying offices in Paris, excepting a few of those owned and run by American firms, are, like the copy houses and most of Paris, situated in old stone buildings, built about dirty courts. The halls are dark and the stairs wind you up to the offices.

I went up to Madame Ellis' office. She was there, alone, with a large pile of boxes from Chanel. The boxes were hastily opened, dresses pulled out and shaken from their tissue paper covers. "Put them under your coat," said Madame, "and get them back here as fast as you can."

I automatically obeyed, delighted to be in the process of verifying this source, flew downstairs, into a taxi, to the Faubourg St. Honoré, up our backstairs, and shed my booty on the floor of the stockroom. The workgirls had gone home. The fitters were there. They took the clothes and made accurate patterns of them, while I made accurate sketches.

Madame Doret even more accurately examined every line, made notes on buttons, belts, cut bits of material from the seams, and looked over the finishing. We had six or eight new Chaneles to sell.

Someone was sure to say, however untruthfully, during the examination, "How Chanel has the nerve to deliver

clothes made this way! Look, it's all cut off the grain. The inside seams aren't even finished."

But, well or badly made, the idea was there, we had it, and the clothes went back under my fur coat. I went back in a taxi to my waiting Madame Ellis. The models were put back in their tissue paper, and off they went to New York on a fast boat.

That was the only office I ever went to for that purpose. But it was by no means the only office from which we got models. That happened to be an order for New York. We got a great many clothes from a Dutch buyer who probably got a cut on the profits, or some such thing. And there was also a German who did a good deal of running in and out with packages.

There was a regular business of buying muslin patterns of dresses. The patterns began to appear as soon as the work-rooms of the big designers got going on a new collection. They were often not authentic, so we didn't buy many. These patterns were, of course, stolen by the sewing girls who worked in the ateliers of Vionnet, Lanvin, etc., and copied as the new designs were made up.

A more picturesque source was the mistress. Our best mistress was kept by the manager of a famous designer. She got all her clothes from the big house. Then she rented them out to various copyists to turn an honest penny on the side. This source always rather pleased me, but Madame Doret didn't really like it much because those particular models got into the hands of every copy house in town.

One couldn't help thinking that all of this might be stopped. It might have. But, for one thing, I doubt if the fabric houses wanted it stopped. They could have simply refused to sell the materials to copyists. They didn't. At least, we always bought direct and I was never aware of any diffi-

culty. The fabric houses must have sold as much to copyists of certain materials as they ever did to the originator of the model. And there is an old tradition in Paris that the day a designer isn't copied, he is dead.

However, efforts were made to close up copy houses from time to time. The general bootlegging atmosphere always prevailed at our place. Models were never left in sight, and everything was constantly kept in readiness to be hurried out the door.

This may have been because a few years before I went there, the place had been raided. The whole story is typical of the devious ways in which the copyists continue their existence against any odds. The house was raided by the police, acting for a combination, which I remember included Lanvin and Callot, and, I think, one other large couturier.

There is a special organization in Paris which is maintained by the couturiers for the purpose of protection against copying. Lanvin, Callot, et al., on suspecting a certain copy house, turn the matter over to this bureau who in turn calls in the police of the district to pull a raid. The copy house must be caught with the actual and perfect copies on the premises before it can be prosecuted.

Madame Doret was caught with the goods, perfect copies, and a suit was brought. But it all came out okay, and why?

The intelligent little Madame Doret had once been very kind to a customer. The customer had gone motoring with a gentleman, and was hurt in an auto accident. The gentleman with whom she was motoring was not the gentleman who was paying her bills. How she landed on the hands of her copyist at this point, I do not know, but Madame Doret got her off into hiding, and took care of the whole affair, so that not a word ever got about. The gentleman who paid her bills just happened to be a minister in the government.

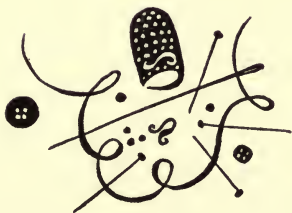
So, when the copy house was raided and faced with disaster, by a simple gesture Madame Doret got the lady she had befriended to get the minister of the government to do something. The copy house was fined a few thousand francs and closed up—for two months.

If couturier designers, people who design for and maintain their own dressmaking establishments, ever rise to a sufficient prominence in New York, we will have our Dorets to organize the copying for the individual. At the moment, copying is not very serious—in this field. It is done by inefficient people who have not discovered how to get the originals. Even when they do copy, their workmanship is apt to be bad.

Of course, when I say there is no copying in New York, I only mean to imply that we don't do things in a small way. We have mass production!



5 : *The Photographic Eye*



LIFE at Doret's, with its multiplicity of customers, their buttons and belts, and an intermingling of excitement in stealing dresses, lasted from August, 1925, until the middle of January, 1926. Everything that had to do with work was a pleasure.

I learned to recognize the styles of the various French designers through selling our copies of their clothes. I learned to speak French rapidly, fluently, with a horrid interspersing of argot. I led the life of a petite bourgeoisie Parisienne saleslady whenever I could.

Several times I went to dance halls on Saturday afternoon with the other salesgirls. We went to a very large and gaudy place on Montmartre, greatly resembling Roseland in New York, except that there were no paid girls to dance with. We were the girls.

One went in, took a table, ordered a soft drink, and waited. The boys were at other tables or lined up against the wall. When the music started, one of them would come up and bow very formally. Not a word was exchanged. If you liked his looks, you arose and danced. If you didn't like his looks, you politely regretted and were then stuck for that dance. It was not etiquette to turn down one and immediately accept another.

The music was frightful, a very big band which played old American jazz badly. If you danced, not a word was spoken by your partner unless you started a conversation. All my conversations were of a very desultory nature and I wasn't much of a success. The instant the music stopped, you were left high and dry just where you stood and had to return alone to your table. Nobody was ever drunk. It was quite like dancing school.

Apparently it served the necessary purpose of making new friends. One of the girls from Doret's ultimately married a Swiss boy she met dancing there. I never had any such luck, although there was one day a gentleman who danced with me several times who was not unattractive. Several months later, as I was quietly having a drink with someone

at the Ritz Bar, in he walked with quite an elegant lady. We didn't bow.

Often I went home with one of the salesgirls for a family dinner in some very small, very hot, very crowded little apartment in the suburbs of Paris. My favorite dish which came into their menus was rabbit stew, and each girl had a grandmother who had a different way of cooking it. One did it with red wine, another with white, another with no wine at all. It was always delicious.

Most of the time after work, I spent by myself. I only had one beau that winter. Men are always very very scarce in Paris for young American girls except when June brings in the tourists. My one young man was half French, half American.

His family were all French in speech and habit and I used to be really terrified to go there for meals. I still only half understood conversation in French unless it was directed straight at me. My own answers were so full of the slang I'd picked up from Monsieur Doret that every time I opened my mouth, I got a laugh or a look of horror from my hostess. I was painfully shy.

So I took to guide books and French architecture and gave myself a course on Saturdays and Sundays, walking around museums, hunting up odd bits of Romanesque sculpture on the corners of dilapidated old churches in distant corners of Paris. It filled up time. I've forgotten most of it and I doubt if it did me any good. I have just never been able to distinguish Louis XIV from Louis XV furniture.

The burden of my life was finances. I had 500 francs a month from Doret. I had about \$25 a month from writing for the newspaper at home and the department store in Wilkes-Barre. It all came to some 1,200 francs, the exchange being about 25 francs to the dollar.

For the average French working girl, that was riches. The sewing girls got 300 francs a month for working some forty-eight hours a week. The other salesgirls in our shop had about 800 francs a month with commissions. I was never able to come out right on my 1,200. I *had* to have a room with central heat and running water. It cost me 700 francs a month. It was madness, but it was clean, large, reasonably livable. The bed was set into an alcove in the wall with curtains so I didn't get any air at night but it could look like a living room. I had a little closet with the running water. Baths were 3 francs each. It is possible to keep clean without baths.

I made my breakfast on a sterno, had my lunch free at the shop. Most of my dinners I ate in the Foyer Feminine, a sort of French Y.W.C.A., where there was a cafeteria and I could get a meal for a couple of francs, less than ten cents. I should have managed but I never quite did. The reason was that every time I got a hundred francs ahead, I went out and bought myself ninety-nine francs' worth of good food in an expensive restaurant. So most of the time I had about five francs between me and my diamond ring.

I didn't have time to get bored with Doret's. After I'd mastered the copying business and my French, Madame Ellis stepped into the breach. She took to chatting with me in the office more and more often. Finally she offered me a job. Would I like to sketch, during the next buying season, for her New York manufacturer?

The question meant one thing to me. I would get into all the couturiers' houses and see their collections. To Madame Ellis and her boss, Mr. Weinstock, it meant something much more important.

The situation among American buyers in Paris during the years I worked there was very simple. As a buyer of

expensive French models for American mass production, you stole what you could and bought what you had to. Almost every important buyer took to the first showing of every couturier a sketcher. The sketcher was ostensibly an assistant buyer. Her real job was to remember as many of the models as possible and subsequently sketch them for the buyer to copy in New York later.

The sketching business was a very lucrative one for a young woman living in Paris. The buyer who took you in bought, automatically, every sketch you could make. I was paid \$1.50 a sketch by Weinstock and Co.

Besides the ten really important couturiers, there were at least ten others of minor importance. Each couturier shows two major collections of clothes each year, in August and February. Then there are the mid-season small collections in November and April. November is advance spring, April, advance fall. The less important houses show first, and the openings, first showings, continue over a three weeks' period, ending with the most important houses, in those days, Patou, Vionnet, Chanel.

A good sketcher can average fifteen accurate sketches per collection. The sketches are not made at the collection, of course. It is entirely a question of memory, assisted by whatever notes one can make at the showing without attracting the attention of the salespeople. Having seen the clothes and made the notes, the sketcher rushes home to draw the dresses. Since the buyer does not buy at the opening, but returns later for that purpose, the sketcher has a second chance to see the clothes in which the buyer is interested and afterwards can correct the sketch.

As Madame Ellis explained to me, Weinstock would buy the entire 300 sketches, netting me \$450. And that was not all. Through her, I could contact buyers who were not for-

fortunate enough to have their own sketchers. I might sell them copies of the original designs and garner in another couple of hundred dollars.

As a sketcher becomes known to the buyers, they leave her blanket orders for a hundred sketches at a time of the openings which they do not come to Paris to see. Few buyers came for the mid-season collections. It was possible to make as much as a thousand dollars in the three weeks of the openings. Since one could live in comparative luxury on \$100 a month in Paris in 1926, and, as a sketcher, had a chance to earn between \$500 and \$1,000 every four months, it was a perfect existence financially.

Between buying seasons, one could rest and travel on the ill-gotten gains. As an embryo designer, the opportunity to see all the work of the Paris couturiers was unquestionably my greatest desire. The desire was so great that I did not for one moment consider the ethics of the matter. I had come to Paris for one thing: to learn about designing clothes. I was convinced, then and now, the best way to learn was by working in the field. And besides it was the only practical way for me. I must support myself to my education.

I accepted Madame Ellis' offer and got my second lesson in how to acquire French designs at something less than retail price. I met the American buyers.

At the beginning of every new season in Parisian dress-making, the city is flooded with dress buyers from all over the world. There were fewer American than others, German, English, Dutch, South American. I dealt only with the Americans. I suppose the rest of them had their sketchers too.

The American dress buyers were of two categories, those who bought for department stores, and for the manufacturers. Nowadays, Paris buying is relatively unimportant to the department store. They rely on the manufacturers to

buy for them. In the halcyon days before 1929, everybody bought.

The department store buyer had an allowance which varied with the size of her department and the importance of her store. Many such buyers actually bought only four or five dresses a season. They came mainly to get the new fashion trends at first hand as a guide to later buying from manufacturers in New York. I think the biggest store buyers in those days were Bergdorf Goodman and Hattie Carnegie. They probably bought fifty to seventy-five models at least.

The big houses charge around \$200 a model. There was the duty to pay getting it into the United States. There were the sizable traveling expenses of the buyers. It is safe to assume that each dress cost \$400 in toto, so that an important buyer spent between twenty and thirty thousand dollars a season.

One can easily understand what an evil day it was for the French when the department stores realized that buying models was not necessary for them. Of course, Carnegie and Bergdorf and many other specialty shops still buy a good many models, but they have cut down considerably. They cannot sell for \$250 what a manufacturer has copied for \$25.

The big manufacturing houses bought from twenty-five to fifty models. They, too, have cut down on the number. There are certain people who buy a large number of models and afterward rent them out to manufacturers to copy in New York. It is not necessary to spend thirty thousand dollars to know what the French are designing or to make copies of it.

But 1926 gave no hint of the impending disaster. The buyers came in dozens. Ours came toward the end of January.

Mr. Weinstock was a large, gray-haired, rather dapper gentleman, owner of one of the largest and best expensive-dress manufacturing houses in New York. He made afternoon and evening clothes which sold wholesale about \$89.50, retail around \$175. With him he had two designers. One of them, a roundish lady in her forties, had been with the firm for ten years. The other designer was a snappy young Italian, rather chic and definitely attractive.

Their great task was to see all the new clothes in Paris. Of these they would buy about fifty. The two designers would take all the ideas they could garner in. I would provide them with as many sketches as was humanly possible.

Fortunately for me in my new job, the first week or so of a buying season is easy. Only the unimportant houses are showing. They are not in a position to be rude to buyers who see their clothes and don't buy. They are not in a position to stop sketchers from taking a good many notes.

All the houses knew perfectly well that one in every eight people at an opening was a sketcher. The sketchers were all young, not particularly well dressed. A sketcher has a special photographic way of looking at a dress, engraving its image on her mind, marking her program a little too freely. In the small shops, we were allowed to ply our outrageous trade because, after all, what difference did it make? The buyers would buy a dress even if we did steal six others. It was worth it.

The big couturiers made a decided effort to catch us. However, if Mr. Weinstock was buying six dresses at Patou, it was a ticklish business, in the face of a \$1,200 order, to risk insulting the wrong person. They had to catch us red-handed which seldom happened.

The season may have started off easily, but it rose to a nerve-racking pitch in the last week. One after another

the big couturiers opened their doors and showed their hundreds of new designs to the rapacious buyers.

On Tuesday, at ten A.M., I would meet the Weinstock group at Premet. There I was planted between the two designers. Every time one of them wanted a dress sketched, she'd poke me in the ribs with her elbow. I'd settle my eyes on the dress and leave them there until the mannequin who wore it had made her last turn, her final flip of the fanny.

Then I'd carefully make an identifying note beside the number of that dress on my program. "No. 23 Champs Elysées," the program would say. I'd say "Bl . . 4 bts sq nk." meaning black dress with four buttons down one side of a square neck.

After that I would very carefully not look at anything until I got another poke in the ribs. I'd just sit and say over and over to myself, "Black wool crêpe with four six-inch pleats on the left hip, patent leather belt with snail buckle, square neck quite high with a pleated ruffle on it," and so on. Amazingly enough, hours later, it would all come back to me.

The minute the Premet showing finished, I'd dive into a taxi and go home. There, with a glass of milk for lunch, I'd draw up the notes. Then, into another taxi and so to Lanvin at 2:30. After Lanvin, 5:00, back to Premet to look over the clothes while the buyers bought one or two. By seven, I'd be home again, correcting the Premet sketches and making drawings of the notes on Lanvin.

By 7:30, I must be out again with a book containing the finished sketches from the day before. If I didn't catch the buyers while they were dressing for an evening of gaiety, I never would.

Into the Crillon. "May I come up, Mrs. Morovitz?" Of

course. None of them ever passed up a chance to get another sketch of a dress they wanted but hadn't bought.

"I have the sketches from Callot, Mrs. Morovitz." She'd look them over, order four or five. Then, "I hope, Miss Hawes, that you'll get a good set from Patou tomorrow."

"Of course, Mrs. Morovitz. Today I got Premet and Lanvin. I'll bring them in to you tomorrow night."

"Oh, well, why don't you wait and bring them the next day along with the Patou sketches. There isn't a boat going until Thursday." The sketches were sent out on every fast boat, giving the left-at-home designers something to work on.

From Mrs. Morovitz, I'd go on to two or three other hotels and other buyers. Finally, after a beer and a ham sandwich at the corner bistro, home again. Home, at 10:30 P.M., to sit down and make thirty finished sketches, the notes from Premet, corrected, those from Worth, left over from the Monday afternoon showing. Into bed by two in the morning.

Ten-thirty found me repeating the pattern at Paquin. two-thirty saw us breathlessly waiting a major event. Jean Patou was opening.

Patou's openings were gigantic. His showrooms were vast, delicately Louis something-or-other, and jammed with the united buying strength of the world. We sat with our backs to the long and tightly closed windows. The Place Vendôme lay peacefully without. Within, the haze of cigarette smoke became thicker and thicker as Patou poured out his new elegance, his new colors, his champagne.

Patou's openings were pie for me. I took a back seat, which meant there were rows of people between me and the clothes and the prying eyes of any saleslady. There was no need for any rib-poking indication of what I was to sketch.

I was to sketch the Fords. A Ford is a dress which everyone buys.

Patou decided in advance what models were to be Fords. His showmanship was perfect and unique among the couturiers. He put Fords on six at a time, all alike in line and cut, different in color. This, Mesdames, is No. 46. Here are six of them. You will each order this dress. You will all go home and make six thousand more.

My job was to get all the Fords down cold. There were at least thirty to a Patou collection and Weinstock wouldn't buy more than eight. The rest might be by Patou, but they were, for Mr. Weinstock, out of Hawes. From my sheltered position, I took elaborate notes and sometimes even sketched.

Between Fords, I surveyed the buyers. It was a sight which never ceased to shock me. These two hundred men and women I saw getting tipsy were the people who picked America's clothes.

There was not, in the entire gathering, one woman of style, not a male or a female who was distinguishable from the other one hundred and ninety-nine. Of mink coats, there were plenty, of diamonds, a sufficient number, and not a few of them real. There was a vast accumulation of silver fox across rows of lumpy laps which had a tendency to let handbags slide down, over thickish ankles, to Patou's polished floor. Here and there was Fashion rampant, usually in black with white at the neck and a droopy hat from Rose Descat, banal, boring, slim-ankled and thin-nosed.

When a Ford appeared, all the minks and foxes throbbed a little. Descat hats leaned over to graying sleek heads like Mr. Weinstock's. Whispers.

"Mamsel! Your number. Come over here, Mamsel." Mutters. Bergdorf's buyer took that number. Carnegie took

that number. Lord and Taylor took that number. Macy's took that number. Weinstock took that number.

When you go to an opening, you are given a printed program with the number and name of each dress. As the clothes glide by, you check the numbers which interest you. Maybe you want to buy the dress. Maybe you just want to have another look at that sleeve. Maybe you want Elizabeth Hawes to have a good hard look at it so she'll be sure to get that sketch accurate.

Every buyer has a certain saleswoman. As the buyer leaves after the first showing, she gives the numbers she has selected to her saleswoman. An appointment is made for the buyer to come back, look over her numbers, buy—buy or look again.

Getting out of Patou's after an opening, into the serenity of the Paris dusk was to drop ten years from your life, and you needed an extra ten years for the next day. The next day came Chanel.

Chanel, the battle cry of the world of fashion for nearly a decade. One had to have tickets of admission for all important openings. For the Chanel opening, they were at a premium. She had two small salons and that was that. If you weren't a big enough buyer, you couldn't get in. Weinstock bought as many as ten dresses a season so we all got in.

We got in, our hats over one ear, our coats half pulled off our backs. We drove our way through a mob of screaming men and women who filled the rue Cambon with their wailing. They were wailing because they didn't have any tickets and Chanel was in a position to be firm.

We planted ourselves in the front row and I knew that at last I was up against it. None of your Patou circus atmosphere. No liquor. Nothing but very tall saleswomen posted in every corner, overlooking the crowd, fixing their icy stares

on every little sketcher and every mink-coated buyer alike. No long program to write on. Just a small slip of paper. No long looks at the models. They simply flew in and out.

When I stole designs from the French dressmakers, it was, originally, a game which I developed between me and the mannequin. Her part was to try and get the dress out of the room before I could master the cut of it. My part was to digest its intricacies without missing a seam or a button. I was good. By the time I'd finished my second season of sketching, I could have designed you as pretty a Chanel as the master herself.

But swiping her designs accurately was violent mental exercise. If you made any more moves with your pencil than enough to write the equivalent of a number, someone suddenly leaned over your shoulder and grabbed your paper out of your hand. And these were the sketches the buyers wanted most.

After a Chanel opening, you didn't wait until the next day to go back and buy. You made a date for the first hour you could get and were taken in relation to your buying power. The showing finished about five and we were back at seven, after cocktails at the Ritz Bar for the buyers and my usual dash home to draw the notes.

Chanel's success was one of the things that helped drive me out of the sketching business. I never had any great respect, to put it mildly, for the buyers who employed me. They knew what they had to do and they done it. I knew I wanted to see clothes and I saw them.

The totally mad desire which filled the world for Chanel's designs gave rise to a new angle in stealing them. When we went back to Chanel after the opening to buy, my employers shut me up in a fitting room. They posted one of the gang at the door and the two others went out foraging.

The showrooms were a madhouse. Clothes were lying in tired piles on every chair. Harassed salespeople were dashing about, telling their assistants for the love of heaven to find No. 234. The minute anyone heard someone else asking for No. 234, every buyer in the place asked for it too. They were always afraid they'd miss a "good number." If you missed a good number, when you got home your boss said to you, "For what do I send you to Paris? That you should pass up that black satin at Chanel!"

Weinstock's employes weren't passing anything up. Practically every time there was a wild hunt for a number, it was being held up in front of me in the fitting room. I was sitting comfortably on a chair, guarded from without, sketching Chanels without having to play any game. We got away with practically the whole collection.

Then, carried away by their success, one of the buyers began stuffing bunches of samples into her mink pockets. The other one tore fringe off all the fringed dresses so she could have it copied in New York. Finally one of them stole a belt off a dress.

My buyers were no exceptions to the rule. The next season at Chanel's, no belt was ever brought into a fitting room with a dress.

I made a lot of money off Chanel sketches that season. I finally contracted to do another season of sketching for Weinstock, four months later. But my heart wasn't in it. I started off with a chip on my shoulder and was definitely uncoöperative. I made bad sketches and left out as many lines as I dared.

The French were making beautiful clothes and, heaven knows, I was in a position to believe that all women must want them. I began to feel that the clothes should be paid for.

One day, during my third and last season of sketching, the summer of 1926, I had an appointment to meet my buyers at Miller Soeurs. I got there early. Miller Soeurs was originally a copy house. After they'd copied for a while, they got so they could design well enough themselves so they set up a model house of their own.

When I got there, they just took one look at me. (I'd been there the two previous seasons, of course, with Weinstock.) They said, "We're sorry, but we won't let you in." I said, "You're perfectly right," and left, feeling much better.

When I met my buyers at Lelong's that afternoon, they raised unholy hell with me. They said I had betrayed them and whatnot. I'd gotten far beyond the point of caring what they thought, but I found I had finished with the business of stealing designs.

Not that it mattered to anybody. There's always some new young American girl who looks innocent enough to be taken into Chanel's under the guise of an assistant buyer.

The French have tried to stop the flagrant sketching and stealing at the openings. In 1930, they raided the apartment of one of the big sketch vendors and threw her into jail for a few minutes. And they have tightened up considerably on who gets into openings.

Today a new buyer may be admitted to the house of any couturier of importance once if she is properly accredited. If she doesn't buy, she may not go in the next season. She must buy one thing to gain readmittance.

As a brand new young manufacturing designer explained to me, after making her first trip from Seventh Avenue to Paris and the openings in 1937, "You see, all you have to buy is one blouse and that's only \$50. It's worth it." She knew how to sketch herself.

6 . *News....News....news*



MY FIRST sketching season ended in February, 1926. I went into it penniless and came out with \$500 in the Bankers Trust. I'd been in Paris eight months and was at last solvent. I still believed firmly that all beautiful clothes were made in the house of the French couturiers and that all women wanted them.

I took one fifth of my capital and invested it in a lovely little suit at Callot where I got a special price. I got a special price because I had purchased things there for Madame Doret. My saleslady at Callot thought they were for my mother. She always felt I should have something for myself so I took advantage of her innocence.

Subsequently I dressed myself at Callot for some time, getting some beautiful bargains in stylish clothes which lasted me for years. I had an extra fondness for Callot because the American buyers found her out of date and unfashionable. She was. She just made simple clothes with wonderful embroidery. Embroidery wasn't chic.

The occasion of my extravagance was my mother's coming to Europe. I hadn't had a new rag to my back since I left America. I met my mother at Cherbourg the first of March, dressed in my new suit and feeling very fine. I proceeded to initiate her into life as I had seen it in Paris, including the food at the Foyer Feminine.

She proceeded to initiate me into taking taxis, eating good food, taking a bath every day, and otherwise enjoying the fine things of life. We traveled around Normandy and Belgium.

When she left I still had most of my \$400. I also had reacquired a desire for an American standard of living. Another buying season was knocking at the door, mid-season April, 1926, in the shape of Madame Ellis, who expected me to sketch for Weinstock.

I sketched, filled many outside orders. I banked \$750 on May first and hated myself a little and all American buyers much more.

The minute that season finished, I leapt onto a bicycle and spent three weeks touring Brittany with Bettina Wilson.

As a foil for the dressmaking racket, it proved eminently successful.

All you can take with you on a bicycle trip is a sweater, an extra set of underclothes, and a toothbrush. You have a perfect and intimate view of the scenery coupled with just the right amount of exercise. At the end of your easy-going thirty miles a day, you invariably find that delectable supper and wonderful bed for which the French are so justly famous.

At the end of three weeks, you are exceedingly healthy and so utterly filthy that a return to the fashionable life is all you ask. True, after ten months in Paris, I was not yet fed up on clothes, style, fashion, the Ritz Bar, Montmartre or the Bois de Boulogne.

The buyers appeared to me to be a horrible phenomenon created by God to disgust me and all the French couturiers. I saw that it was worth it to the French. Obviously, it was worth it to me. Otherwise I should not have had my bicycle trip.

After the bicycle trip, I still had time and money to get myself to Italy where I joined up with an old college friend. We were motored from Florence to Venice and the lakes. We ended in Geneva where I enjoyed my first look at the Council of the League of Nations in action. I found I was getting like the French, skeptical.

Back in my same 800-franc Paris room, I found myself with a few hundred francs and my diamond ring. It was the middle of July, 1926. The buyers were about to descend again. I decided to have another season of sketching, replenish my finances.

While flitting from opening to opening like a bird of prey, I developed an idea for the future. The future was definitely still Paris to me. I loved it. I had acquired friends, both male and female. I wanted to travel more in Europe.

Being thrown out of Miller Soeurs having brought me up sharp on the business of stealing sketches, I must find another means of support.

My plan involved going back to New York to start it. The idea was very simple. I saw that there was only one set of fashion news from Paris. I had been feeding bits of it to the store in Wilkes-Barre. They liked and used it. They sent me copies of ads which said that their Paris representative told them everything was blue this season—"and on our fourth floor you will find *our version* of blue, done with the new flared skirt which our Paris representative tells us is all the rage."

I decided that there must be hundreds of small department stores, who could use this news, who had no direct contact with the source of all fashion. I couldn't think how they ever got on without Paris news every week. I figured that a service could be syndicated and sold to such stores for a reasonable figure.

With no further knowledge of small department stores in middle-sized cities than my brief reporting for Wilkes-Barre, I built up my idea, went back to New York, sold it to a syndicate. It was no more unreasonable than most fashion reporting ideas.

It took me three months to get my syndicate. I kept being sent from one friend on a newspaper to a friend on a magazine to a friend in a store to a friend in a syndicate to another friend in another syndicate. All one really requires for putting anything over is enough energy and resistance to keep on plugging the idea. Someone will eventually fall.

A very large and grandfatherly gentleman was running a syndicate called Cosmos. He gazed down upon me from his great height and bulk and listened with extraordinary interest. He was syndicating a weekly fashion feature from

Paris. It was a story with pictures which went to the *Post* in New York, the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Baltimore Sun* and other papers of equal standing.

This feature was being run by a boy in Paris who, I was told, was doing a remarkable job. However, it was too much work for one person. The boy screamed by every boat for an assistant. Why shouldn't I be sent, first as an assistant, secondly to work out the syndicate store service idea?

While the old gentleman considered that thought, I happened into the newly born *New Yorker* office. Lois Long was doing their fashion column. Lois Long went to Vassar. The *New Yorker* had no Paris fashion news. It was arranged in the twinkling of an eye. I was to send them one cable a month and one five hundred word story. For this I would get \$150 a month.

The Cosmos Syndicate seemed greatly impressed by this news. He hired me. I was a fool. I figured everything in francs. I told him \$25 a week would be plenty until we got the store syndicate started. He played poor, but he did send me back to Paris. He had to. I didn't have a nickel left.

I returned to Paris rich enough in prospects for my taste, anyway; \$250 a month was around 7,000 francs, twice what a French midinette gets in a year. Eagerly I sought out Sylvestre, my boss, the other employe of the Cosmos Syndicate.

Sylvestre's was a typical Paris fashion idea. Sylvestre was a typical 1926 Paris fashion reporter.

What Sylvestre told me was this: He was half French. He knew all the great French designers intimately. He understood chic as no one ever had before or since. The great designers would tell him, Sylvestre, things they would never tell an ordinary reporter. He could get advance information. He could obtain sketches never given out to any other reporter.

This is the usual case with fashion reporters in Paris. Each one has some magic way of finding out what no one else can. Either the reporter has a cousin who is a Duke or a rumor floats around that the reporter is very intimately connected with the Count de Falderol. Sometimes, my dear, they say that certain reporters are the bastard daughters of English peers. Anyway, no Paris fashion reporter is quite an ordinary mortal. One couldn't employ just humans to tell about miracles.

The grains of truth in Sylvestre's story unfolded themselves to me in the next month. Sylvestre was half French. Sylvestre knew Jenny quite well. Jenny was a couturier who was of little interest to the fashion world. Sylvestre knew the manager of Redfern well. Redfern was about dead. Sylvestre knew Charlotte intimately. Charlotte designed for the house of Premet. Premet had nice young clothes which were of no particular importance.

The first day I met Sylvestre, he gave me a rendezvous at some hotel on the Champs Elysées for tea. He told me that everyone was going to wear gray that season and that this was a very smart hotel. I told him that nobody ever went there for tea and besides that, gray was never very much worn because it was too unbecoming.

We left the hotel and went back to his apartment where we drank Jamaica rum and became friends. Sylvestre was not very interested in the store project but he took no time at all in winding me into his newspaper story.

His little reporting racket was perhaps the easiest ever worked out. We had to send out one fashion story a week. Each story was about one designer and carried with it six sketches. We got absolutely no information that anyone else couldn't also get.

It worked this way. On Monday we realized that a fast

boat was getting off Wednesday. Sylvestre called whatever big designer we had next on the list. He called the press agent whom he had already contacted and to whom he had explained all, mostly how he was the most important newspaper person in Paris.

The press agent was being paid to get his designer into the papers so it wasn't very difficult for him to lay his hand on six sketches. It was particularly easy for him because Sylvestre never cared what sketches we got. All we wanted was six of them with explanations.

I would go around and pick up the sketches sometime Tuesday. I usually rounded into Sylvestre's apartment late Tuesday afternoon, sketches in hand. We had a drink. Then we had dinner. Then I sat down at the typewriter and wrote two news columns about the six brand new things in question, things which may have been designed any time during the past four months. At first I often couldn't see anything new about them.

Sylvestre taught me to observe every line and pocket. He taught me that everything I saw was new. He taught me how to write a fine lead on the subtlety of Vionnet's rhythmic line or the delicate softness of a Jenny gown. In the beginning I often had to do the whole thing over twice, but eventually I got so I could vomit out the stories in an hour of concentrated hyperbole.

After that, we went out for a drink. The next noon I got the stuff off on the boat train. We repeated it the next week. When I felt forehanded, I got several stories done in a day and left town for a couple of weeks.

Once we decided we ought to go to the Riviera. Sylvestre knew Frank Harris and it began to seem that our reporting needed a new note. Frank Harris happened not to be at his villa near Nice and we really didn't have much money. We

spent some time in Marseilles and some more time in very cheap night clubs in Nice. One day we went to Monte Carlo by bus. We sent quite a glowing report of the new things on the Riviera that spring.

Of course, if you are a conscientious reporter, you don't behave like that. You get up in the morning and go from one hat place to another bag place to the Ritz for lunch. You cultivate the right people, your cousin the count, or your rich friend who has a villa in Cannes.

You night-club in the right places. You follow the ponies to the races and the chic monde all over the lot, from London to the Lido. And you suffer.

The minute you persuade yourself or some newspaper or magazine in America that there is fashion news in Paris or anywhere else on the Continent every week, you are in for a life of hell. Unless you're blessed with a good healthy imagination and no inhibitions, you get looking like all other fashion reporters in Paris.

Most of them are quite gaunt. Their skin is dry and they have a pinched look around the mouth. They are the dowdiest looking bunch imaginable. They don't make enough money to buy expensive clothes and there isn't anything else in France.

Only four times a year is there really fashion news in Paris. Two of those times, it's big news, all the summer or winter clothes, shoes, hats, bags, jewelry which Paris can think up, and that's plenty.

The other two times, it's mid-season collections, small fill-in showings of advanced spring or fall clothes, tossed out for foreign buyers. There really isn't much in those showings, but the clothes are new and one can legitimately report them as news.

In between times, the reporter must manufacture brand

new fashion ideas. If you feel like it, you can go to Biarritz or Cannes or the Lido or wherever you can see real, live society women wearing the clothes you formerly saw and have already reported from the previous openings.

You can report it all over again as something to scream over. If you're at all bright, you know perfectly well when you see the clothes on the mannequins at Chanel's which ones are going to be seen later at different resorts. If you want to, you can find out from the saleswomen in the various dressmaking houses who bought what. Then all you have to do is watch the society columns to see where the women go and report them there, in the clothes.

Even if you go all the places and do all the things, you are still faced with those dreadful weeks when the chic monde seems to have evaporated. The couturiers seem to have buried themselves. It rains. There is nothing new under the sun.

You rewrite old columns in a new way. You find eleven different ways of telling the world that women in Paris are wearing two silver foxes around their necks. You concentrate on details to such an extent that all the world begins to hinge on whether The Duchess de X had on heels an inch high or one and a half inches high.

After piling it on thicker and thicker, you send it off to your newspaper syndicate. In a week or so, all the women in the United States are informed of the major events in life. They are left in no doubt but that, unless they can get two silver foxes, they are absolutely out of fashion. They are bombarded with news of what the chic monde is wearing for bathing at the Lido. They don't know where the Lido is or what it looks like and they go to Jones Beach every Sunday, wearing whatever kind of bathing suit Gimbel chose to provide that season.

There must have been over a hundred American fashion reporters in Paris in 1926. Many of them conscientiously sent out news regularly to American newspapers. From what I see now and again in the news columns, a lot of them are still there, turning out the same stuff.

However, it is my impression that the American newspaper situation in re Paris fashions is cleaning itself up. The U.S. newspapers have discovered that it is not really good business for them to have in their columns fashion news about things which can't be bought on the spot. They now incline toward columns with a little box at the bottom saying that if you will write in, you will be told in what local store the item mentioned can be bought. The local fashion girls are having their day.

In 1926 there were many Paris offices devoted to the business of sending news to the various fashion and women's magazines in America. Of those, *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* were the largest. They are now about the only offices left. They have a unique position in Paris, being recognized as the most important publicity agents the French can use. The French couturiers and these two magazines are in business together, in business to promote chic and keep the world of fashion spinning.

As with the newspapers, there is a vast difference today in the amount of French news crowding the pages of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*. In the late '20's, ninety percent of the drawings and photographs were the work of the Parisian couturiers, often elaborate creations, which nobody ever wore anywhere. Now those pages are filled only with such French designs as actually come to America and are, for the most part, manufactured here. Many pages in both magazines are devoted to clothes created in America for American life.

Many of the offices which worked from '25 to '29 for

American magazines have been closed. The *Ladies Home Journal*, the largest woman's magazine in the United States, now has no Paris office, and all because they hired a very bright lady as Fashion Editor about 1932.

The lady had worked previously for a department store and also for *Harper's Bazaar*. She said she saw no reason why the *Ladies Home Journal* should maintain an expensive Paris office. She said that magazine catered to middle class American women who never actually saw a French original design. She thought her public was interested in news of what existed in fashion in America, whether it had been originated in Paris or on Seventh Avenue.

In 1926, however, America thought it needed Paris fashion news and Sylvestre, myself, and a hundred others were all busy supplying the need. We were doing our best to build up the French legend.

When I had thoroughly mastered the business of writing Sylvestre's column for him so that he had literally nothing to do but draw down about \$200 a week from the syndicate, I went at him about the store service. I explained to him that all the small department stores needed to know directly what was going on in the big center of fashion and that we were there to do it.

At first Sylvestre wouldn't bite, but as he began to see the matter in terms of additional royalties, he reflected.

He realized that he and only he could get confidential information from the big designers. He got worried about the stores not realizing the fact. Finally he became so intrigued, he told me to go ahead and work out the form and content for the service. He would go to America to see that the Cosmos Syndicate sold it properly.

I, therefore, began to compile short reports for stores. I made thumbnail sketches and résuméed everything weekly:

shoes, hats, bags, gloves, belts, clothes, colors. I indicated what was very new, less new, going out.

Sylvestre got to New York and the thing began to sell. I was rather harassed because I had to continue turning out the fashion column and make an effort to cover the entire Paris market weekly for the store service. It wasn't more than a full time job, but I could have used a secretary.

After about six weeks, Sylvestre returned triumphant. The store service, my brain child, had been sold to Lord and Taylor. Lord and Taylor already had a large office in Paris with plenty of employes who could tell them all. However, Sylvestre had convinced them about his private resources.

I was so busy being appalled by Sylvestre's salesmanship to Lord and Taylor, I forgot that some small stores out of New York had bought the service, too. I was so sick of writing the horrible fashion story weekly, I decided the time had come for action.

My action was quick. I found that Dorothy Shaver, a vice president of Lord and Taylor, was in Paris. I called upon her to make sure my ideas on the matter of the store service were right. She grimly agreed with me that I was correct. It was nothing for Lord and Taylor. I thereupon gave the idea to Sylvestre with my blessing and retired from the Cosmos Syndicate.

I could retire gracefully because there was the *New Yorker*. One hundred and fifty dollars a month was enough to live on until something else came along. Writing news for the *New Yorker* was my favorite fashion job of all time. Even my nom de plume now gives me a small laugh. "Parasite." Someone suggested it at a party given in honor of a brown dress suit, whose I don't recall. It epitomized the whole fashion business much better than I, in my innocence, realized.

Anyone who has ever written fashions will, I am sure, appreciate what it means to be allowed to write with no embroidery just what you think about them. Practically nobody in Paris knew I wrote for the *New Yorker*. I never used it as an entrée to see the collections until shortly before I quit the job.

Not a soul on the *New Yorker* ever gave me a kind word during the three years I sent in my pieces. On the other hand, no one ever complained. The advertising department never raised its ugly head and said that if I thought Patou was no designer, I'd better keep still about it or someone would withdraw his advertising.

After burbling for the *New York Post*, the *Detroit Free Press*, et al., that everything was divine, glamorous, chic, gorgeous, as Sylvestre had taught me, I would retire to the fastness of my own little apartment and tell the *New Yorker* readers that Molyneux was a good safe designer with not too much originality; that Patou thought he'd designed a coat if he put enough fox fur on it; that Talbot had her tongue in her cheek when she made baby bonnets. The *New Yorker*, ladies and gentlemen, is the only magazine I ever saw which had the guts to let its fashion reporters speak their minds. I expressed myself freely in its pages, and through those pages I was made to face facts from time to time. When the printed copy of the magazine came to me in Paris, along with some of my reports, I'd read L.L.'s comments on the new, oh so new, things I'd written up.

Those jersey bathing suits which took my eye at Biarritz existed a whole year ago in the good old U.S.A., said Miss Long. Those daisy little sandals which Dufeu just put out were shown six months ago in Delman's. Patou's newest ten-

nis dress differed very little from one of Best and Co. last summer.

Slowly an idea began to penetrate my mind. All beautiful clothes are designed in the houses of the French couturiers? Well. . . .

7 . *The Bastard Art of Styling*



AFTER clearing my head of the Cosmos Syndicate by dint of some very fast bicycling in Provence, I came back to Paris. It was March, 1927. I had acquired an apartment and a maid and was actually in no mood to live only on the *New Yorker's* money.

The previous fall when I was in New York, I had come upon a very conspicuous box in the New York *Times* one Sunday. R. H. Macy was advertising for a Stylist to send to their Paris office. I didn't know what a stylist was, but I knew I wanted a job in Paris.

The ad said "Apply by letter only." I decided nothing would be lost by looking up a Macy's merchandising man who was a friend of a friend and thereby applying in person. I arrived bright and early Monday morning at Macy's on Thirty-fourth Street. I found my man. He turned out to be an old schoolmate of Jack Strauss.

I was duly introduced to Mr. Strauss who, in turn, introduced me to one Mr. Meyer. Mr. Meyer was a very pleasant, small, thin, blue-eyed and speckled German about forty-five. He had begun his career as a ribbon clerk or something equally proverbial in Macy's. He had risen and risen. He had decided, finally, to retire.

R. H. Macy didn't want him to retire. There is one thing to be said for that store, if they want you badly, they arrange to keep you somehow. Money for the salaries of Macy's executives is plentiful. They arranged a compromise with Mr. Meyer whereby, since he wanted to live in Europe, he would take a part time job overseeing their Paris office.

This brought up the fact that they had no Paris stylist. The word stylist is not definable because styling is a bastard art. It was one of those bright thoughts which flowered during the great prosperity. The department stores were in the money and their thoughts wandered to "good taste."

Of course, before entering wholeheartedly into any such venture as actually hiring people to see that merchandise was in good taste, Macy's would normally test the idea. They made many studies throughout the store. They tried out good taste in rugs and fabrics, in pocket-books and dresses. Good

taste has never been adequately defined by anyone. Macy's never tried to define it to me.

They simply said that they had put on a table in the fabric department several bolts of material. Some were in good taste, some bad. The public bought out the material in good taste first, Macy's said. It worked that way in all departments. Always the public wanted what Macy's conceived of as good taste.

The truth of the matter was very simple. Macy's had been doing an enormous business in cheap merchandise for generations. They employed a large number of buyers who had been there for years. The buyers were in a rut. They supplied the public with the same sort of thing they had bought fifteen years ago. Times change and the public taste changes along with them.

Macy's buyers had been bringing home the bacon in profits all those years. Macy's wanted good taste if it was what sold, but they weren't going to fire a lot of tried and true money-makers. The idea was to employ professionals in "good taste," i.e., stylists.

A stylist is not a buyer nor is she strictly a promotion artist. She was originally put in to urge the buyers to get newer merchandise, chic merchandise, smart merchandise. The stylist had very little authority over the buyer in most stores. Persuasion was her chief tool. At the height of styling, in 1928, all stores in New York who had any pride at all had a stylist for every two or three departments. They saw to it that the departments contained things for the advertising manager to exploit.

Mr. Meyer looked me over that wintry Monday morning. I was dressed in black with two silver foxes. I had on the latest Descat hat. I had on my diamond ring. Mr. Strauss had introduced me.

After listening to the story of my life, I was immediately turned over to a bright young girl. The girl took me all around the store. We arrived first in the shoe department and she stopped in front of a show case. "Which shoe is in good taste and why?" she inquired.

With my intimate knowledge of what the chic European made-to-order woman was wearing, I whipped out the answer. Ninety percent of the shoes were awful. *Nobody* wears shoes with extra trimming. *Nobody* wears walking shoes with French heels. *Nobody* wears shoes with round toes.

I assured her, in the hat department, that nobody wore hats with anything but grosgrain ribbon for trimming. At the jewelry counter, I allowed that everyone was wearing heavy gilt modernistic jewelry and long strings of pearls. Nothing else except real jewels.

The girl became more and more pleased. I told her what had been worn on the Riviera, at Cannes where I had not been last spring. She took me back to Mr. Meyer after an hour or so. On the way back, I asked her what she had been doing to me. She said it was a style test and that I was perfect.

The upshot of it all was that the job was reduced to two, me and another lady who really knew Mr. Strauss. I never saw her but I gathered she was older and chicer. Neither of us had ever been inside a department store before except to shop. We both, however, convinced Macy's that we had good taste.

They hired the other lady and I went back to Paris for the *New Yorker* and my syndicate job. Naturally, when that blew up, my thoughts turned to Macy's.

I took a long taxi ride, away from the Musée Rodin, behind which I lived, across the Seine, up through the Place Vendôme, along the endless boulevards into that section

where I had not been since the old days of transporting Chanel's models.

There, in the Citée Paradis, a cobble-stoned, dead-end street, was Macy's Paris office, a small stone building with a very high ceiling, light basement and two floors above it. The first floor contained many little offices, one beside the other. The top floor contained the "comptabilité," those desks full of bookkeeping and safes full of money, the offices of the French director of the office, and that of Mr. Meyer.

Everything worked out fortuitously because the lady Macy's had hired in New York when I was after the job had just quit or been fired. I said I'd start at any salary they liked for a few weeks and we could see what happened. I was hired for \$50 and an expense account per week.

My duties, like those of the lady just demised were these: I was to report on Paris fashions to R. H. Macy in New York. That was my meat. I was to go out with New York buyers and prevent them from buying anything in bad taste. The buyers were to be told that they could only buy what I allowed them to buy. The price and quantity were their worry, the appearance mine. I was to descend every morning on arrival at the Macy's Paris office to the basement.

In the basement was all the merchandise previously bought by any Macy buyer in Paris. I had two little rubber stamps. One of them was marked "O.K." and had a space below for my name and a date. The other was marked "See letter No. xx" with a place for my name and a date.

The first stylist had been given the right and duty of returning any merchandise which was purchased when her back was turned and which she considered to be in bad taste. It was easy to see why she lasted only three months. Mr. Meyer had then decided that it was preferable to ship the

bad taste merchandise but to have me write a letter explaining why I disapproved of it.

The first two or three weeks I worked for Macy's were easy and I accomplished wonders. I organized all the fashion reports and had them mimeographed. I worked them out with sketches and *résumé*ed them just as I had the Store Service Syndicate. Macy's were bowled over with the beauty and simplicity of that gesture. It looked like a hell of a lot of work and was sent in quantity so all the buyers in New York could have one.

There was only one person in Macy's in New York who evidently resented all my trouble. It was a gentleman named Oswald Knauth. I hadn't met him at the time but I gathered he was pretty important and also very odd. He sent a brief message via Mr. Meyer to the effect that he never wanted any report sent to him of more than fifty words and that most of the time he thought fifty words was too long. Mr. Oswald Knauth is now the president of a large and important group of stores in the United States.

I inspected merchandise and sent along word that it was all in terribly bad taste. There were no New York buyers around and life was pleasant. I realized that I'd better be a good girl. I took my expense account in hand and lunched at the Ritz and night-clubbed with the chic monde. After three weeks I had my salary doubled.

Suddenly my first buyer from New York turned up. She was a jewelry buyer. We went out to buy together.

The first place we went was filled with artificial pearls and rubies and diamonds made into necklaces, bracelets and what not. The buyer would pick up a necklace and say, "How do you like this one?" I always responded, "I think it's awful."

After fifteen minutes of that she said, "This is the line I sell the most of in New York."

We were both quite desperate. I made a hasty decision. I decided that Macy's, whether they knew it or not, couldn't possibly be paying me \$100 a week to ruin their jewelry department. I said, "Why don't you just go ahead and buy whatever you want?"

While she placed an order, I just smoked and looked out the window and began to wonder exactly what Macy's thought they were doing, hiring girls like me to tell their buyers what not to buy.

I lasted seven months in the Macy's job. I attribute it to the fact that I adopted the same policy with all the buyers. I led them to what I had found that was chic in the Parisian sense. I urged them to buy at least a little of that. Then I went about with them and smoked a good deal while they got what they wanted.

Part of my job as stylist was to buy samples of whatever I thought was exceptionally chic in Paris between onslaughts of the real buyer. I sampled things.

Sampling means that you see hundreds of new bags, for instance, and buy one of whichever you like best. You send them on to New York in the fond hope that you will get a re-order to justify your original purchase. Buyers hate this sampling for two reasons. It's expensive: chic's the object and not price, and, more than likely, it's no use to the buyer because some manufacturer in New York has already gotten a sample and copied it. More important to the buyer, if she gets using your samples it may become obvious to the merchandising man, her immediate boss, that she might as well just stay in New York and let some resident buyer or stylist do her foreign buying.

Whenever I got particularly bored with sampling in

Macy's Paris office, I found it a good idea to betake myself to some resort to see what was going on there. One thing must be said for my experience with R. H. Macy. Once they had hired me, they let me do my job as I saw it, entirely and without interference. When we got so we saw the job differently, they fired me.

My first resort trip was Biarritz. All the fashion reporters went down. I told Mr. Meyer I thought I'd better go down.

He agreed that where went the chic monde, there should I follow. If Macy's didn't know at once what was worn in chic European spring resorts, how could they hope to do a good summer business?

I had my first experience, in Biarritz, of leading the chic life. I went to the right beach to swim although there were three others much nicer. I went to drink afterward at the right bar, at the right hour. I went gambling when I was supposed to gamble, and danced when I was supposed to dance.

I was lucky because, although I was a reporter, I had a boy friend. Most of the reporters were wandering around, gaunt, grim, and alone, observing like mad. They were a great help to me. After a couple of drinks, I usually relaxed my vigilance and concentrated on Chemin de Fer. I made quite a lot of money gambling.

The next day, on the beach, I'd sidle up to another reporter and she'd tell me who wore what at the Casino last night. After just two days, I found I could lead my own life. I went to my first bull fight, at San Sebastien just over the Spanish border. I stopped going to the beach because, although it was the season, it was frightfully cold.

I borrowed a car and took another reporter motoring along the coast to St. Jean and decided that if I ever had to

come to Biarritz to observe the chic monde again, I would go directly to St. Jean.

After a week of it, I went back to Paris. I tended to my buyers until it got to be June and I had to go to England because there were the races at Ascot. Later, I had to go to Le Touquet for Macy's news, and because a group of friends were driving down anyway.

Came July and the dress buyers. I was sent off to Vienna with one of them, one of those who had been at Macy's for the last fifteen years. We got on the train one night to go to Vienna. She didn't have a book or a magazine. She just sat for twenty-three hours.

We were supposed to look into the Vienna market to see whether or not, as rumored, one could now buy dresses there. We arrived on a weekend and it became the duty of a little Viennese boy from the office to escort us about the city, sight-seeing on Sunday. We had a car. It stopped outside a large cathedral.

The boy asked the buyer, who was my senior in every way, whether she would care to get out and see the church. "Is it your best church," she inquired, "because if it isn't, I don't think I want to bother."

Later, at lunch, he was chattering along and said, "I read a good deal of American poetry, in translation of course. Have you ever read Walt Whitman?"

"Why should I read Walt Whitman," the buyer wanted to know. "I'm a dress buyer."

I had my first airplane flight, back from Vienna at Macy's expense. And I had one really practical idea for them. In Vienna I found that handknit sweaters cost about \$3.00. In Paris, Schiaparelli was just beginning to have some success with her handknits. She worked in her little first-floor apart-

ment and all the chic women paid her \$12 for her sweaters with their modernistic designs.

Macy's, of course, I had forced to get a few. They were so chic. Even I realized, however, that they were a little expensive to resell.

The French head of the office and I discussed my idea and he authorized me to obtain some modern sweater designs in Paris and send them to Vienna to be copied at \$3.25. Nothing came of it in New York. Apparently modernistic designs on sweaters at \$12 retail were not in good taste for Macy's in 1927.

Those were the only designs I ever had copied for Macy's. Of course, we, like every other resident office, sampled plenty of things which we suspected were never to be re-ordered but only to be copied. Our problem in such sampling was to beat down the manufacturer on the price of the sample by all but promising him that we would get a re-order.

Mr. Meyer suggested to me that he knew I'd been a sketcher and that I might come through for Macy's but la politesse forbade his forcing the issue. I told him this type of work no longer interested me.

The methods of the good buyers were more profitable to some department stores than either sampling or stealing. One handkerchief buyer I knew, for instance, had such a system for beating down the French manufacturers that I am sure they couldn't basically afford to sell to her at all.

She would start by getting the price per dozen. She would then take the price per dozen dozen, compare the two, and get the first price reduced. She would then go off into dozen dozen dozens and get the price reduced again. She would then assure the manufacturer that everyone in New York followed her store's buyers and that he was not in any position to refuse her anything. When she left any given handkerchief

manufacturer, he had sold her thousands of handkerchiefs and probably lost a half a cent on every one.

By the time I'd been five months with Macy's, I did virtually nothing but report fashions. As I saw each new buyer from New York, I established some sort of contact which always ended by seeing her point of view and not only letting her buy what she wanted, but also ceasing in large part to send her samples.

I was bored to death but \$100 a week was so many French francs I couldn't see quitting and reducing my standard of living back to *New Yorker* levels. And at last, in the seventh month, my boss fired me by letter from New York. It was the happiest day of my life, bar none.

Designing was what I had come to Paris to learn. I'd learned a lot but I hadn't designed a dress except for myself. I had watched American manufacturers steal and the department stores buy. They all got the same thing. I was still sold on the fact that they all had to have fashions from Paris. I decided to go back to New York and sell some department store the idea of letting me design clothes in Paris and send them back.

The point was that, being in Paris, I would have the French trend in design. The store which hired me would have a different version of the trend from any other store.

Back in New York, I talked to Altman, who didn't know what I was getting at, and to Lord and Taylor, who didn't care what I was getting at. I decided to work for Lord and Taylor and show them. Lord and Taylor had just planned a whole bureau of stylists in Paris. It seemed to me that somehow by working in the bureau I'd find a chance to design for them.

The lady who was to head the Paris styling bureau had left for Paris. I followed her over and got hired for \$40 a week and an expense account.

I keep mentioning the expense account because it was important in Paris. It made it possible for you to live free all day and have a really clear salary. As a stylist, it was necessary to be out in the town looking up chic most of the time and taxis were the only quick way of getting about. As a stylist it was necessary to go to chic places. The expense account could pay for most of one's food and all of one's traveling.

Nobody mentioned my designing in Lord and Taylor's Paris office. I was given a desk in a row of five. The head stylist had an office to herself. There were three others, another young American girl, much like myself, a youth who had worked for Lord and Taylor in New York, an older American lady who had lived for years in Paris. The older American lady had been the only Paris stylist for Lord and Taylor but, I gathered, had not fully realized the necessity for more and more and more fashion from the center of style. The fashion staff was completed by a French secretary and myself.

I had been over the bumps in Macy's Paris office and knew a good deal about the Paris market. The Paris market is not only all the big dressmakers but also all the designers of hats, bags, gloves and what not, and, last but not at all least, the manufacturers of toilet accessories, boxes, handkerchiefs and their cases, jewelry, everything to make the women happy.

There were also all the Paris decorators. Macy's had had a modern furniture show before I worked for them and Lord and Taylor were very, very decoration-conscious.

I had a rather annoying incident when I was fired from Macy's. My address book disappeared from my desk where I left it the day I was fired. When I came back to collect it

the next day, there it wasn't. It contained the addresses of everyone from whom Macy's bought.

The idea is that one store can have sources of which no other store knows. This is of course all sheer nonsense. The minute any manufacturer in any town sells anything to anybody, he instantly notifies all the other stores and tries to frighten them into buying something too.

When I got the Lord and Taylor job, I wanted my old address book quite badly. It had taken me months to make it and it meant retracing the same ground. Of course, nobody in the Macy's office ever had the foggiest idea where the book could possibly have gone. I finally found my old secretary who had also been fired from Macy's. She immediately said she was so sorry she hadn't informed me before, but that of course in her thorough way of providing for the future she had always kept a copy of my addresses for herself. She made me a new copy of my book so my life in L and T started smoothly.

We all worked more or less on everything. I was specifically given the decorating departments. It was fun working for Lord and Taylor. Somehow there wasn't the pressure one felt in Macy's. We none of us got much money but there were six to do what I had been supposed to do alone at Macy's. All the people were consequently more human.

The head of the styling office kept pretty busy. She didn't like Paris and always refused to eat where she thought it was dirty. She didn't speak French much. The older lady, who had always lived in Paris, had a fixed social life. She understood pretty clearly what she was supposed to do and took it quite seriously.

I found myself with a couple of healthy young Americans who had never worked in Paris before, eager to learn all about the great world of style. I taught them all I knew

and we got our jobs so boiled down that we never had to work more than half a day, sometimes not even that. I knew all the sources and we just split up what we had to see to, working singly or in pairs as seemed advisable. The idea was not like the French, that life is leisurely and work may be done slowly. We did all our work with the utmost speed so that in one day we could easily do three days' tasks.

For instance, I thought it would be nice for Lord and Taylor to have some fine modern rugs. It only took me one day and many taxis to notify a few designers that I wanted rug designs. I could have spent two weeks doing it. Then it took me another couple of days to collect the designs, get prices on possible execution in Paris, make up a report and send it all into the head office in New York.

The disturbing part of it was that no word ever came back from the head office of any of the work we actually accomplished. Just what happened to it, I don't know to this day. We only tracked down one case to its finish.

The youth and I thought that a set of modern monograms would be nice for the men's department. We got an allowance of \$50 to have them made up. We got a friend of mine, a painter, to work on them. This consumed many many days with trips to the painter's studio, long discussions, drinks.

Finally the monograms were completed and sent over, we thought for Christmas handkerchiefs. A year later when the boy returned to New York to work in the store there, he ascertained that the monograms had never been used. He looked about and found them—under a blotter on someone's desk.

It was fundamentally discouraging, getting up an idea, working it out, and never hearing another word about it. It was an easy pleasant life leading to nothing but cafés on the left bank where we went for breakfast after reporting for

work at nine. True, after breakfast we went on to a box manufacturer and got whole new sets of closet boxes made up for some buyer to see and order on when she arrived. She either didn't arrive or didn't order.

Somehow it was just too far from Paris to New York. The ideas got lost en route. We never knew whether something had already been done in New York. We never knew whether it was cheaper to do it in New York or Paris. We had the same old Macy's trouble, the buyers didn't want us.

Lord and Taylor's buyers didn't need us much either, because they weren't so old nor so set as the Macy buyers. They probably even read Walt Whitman like their customers, some of them. The Paris stylist had a bastard job.

The New York stylist was nearer the heart of things, but she had a bastard job too. No buyer wanted her. She was just another salary to the merchandising man. If the buyer couldn't supply what the store thought the public wanted, having an attractive girl at hand with large ideas on what was smart didn't solve the problem.

The point is: the stylist didn't have any better taste than anyone else. The stylist was supposed to have newer taste. Maybe she did have newer taste, but there was nothing to prove she could figure out what the majority of women wanted, because she had been to a good school and afterward done her time in European art galleries.

The department stores discovered a lot of this when the depression came. I think that most of them discovered it is the job of the buyer to know both her figures on sales and profits and the general level of the public taste. No store can afford to get above the general level of its public's taste. They just lose their customers. The problem of the department store is to keep exactly even with changing taste.

What the chic European woman wears where she goes is

of minimum importance to a department store buyer. The clientele of R. H. Macy and Lord and Taylor is not composed of chic women. Chic women don't give bridge parties. They don't go to the *matinée*. They aren't faced with that problem of what to wear to dinner when the men don't dress.

The buyers knew all that. But the stores were rich and the public had money to spend. The advertising departments wanted glamour to pile on. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars building the French legend. Not only dresses, but everything that a woman bought, used, wore, was supposedly designed in Paris. The department stores of the United States made an enormous capital investment in the names of the French *couturiers*.

Lord and Taylor's and other Paris style bureaus died a natural death when the depression cut down spending. Long before that, I left it. I only stayed with Lord and Taylor four months, in fact. I saw that nobody had the faintest intention of letting me give my version of the current style in clothes. The stores weren't a bit embarrassed in 1927 by all having the same clothes to sell. They liked it.

The stylist was flourishing. There was plenty of money to pay her. Everything in fashion was bigger and better and more French every hour.

Main Bocher, then the Paris editor of *Vogue*, offered me a job on his magazine.

8 · Cutting, Pinning and Draping



IT WAS April of 1928 when I was called to the *Vogue* office. With no hesitation at all, I declined the job. I told Monsieur Bocher that I had come to Paris to learn to design clothes, that I was ready to start. If I couldn't design clothes in Paris, I was going home to America.

Main Bocher was very sympathetic. Probably he was feeling the same way, since he very soon afterward started his own place and turned out to be a couturier himself.

He said that if I was so bent on designing, he'd get me a job. He said he might be able to get me into Patou or Lanvin or Nicole Groult. The first two were among the famous. Nicole Groult, the sister of Poiret, had a little shop on a side street and did rather conservative, nice clothes. I decided I'd prefer Groult because she had such a small place that I might really be allowed to do some work. It seemed impossible to me that either Patou or Lanvin would ever let me cut up a piece of material.

Nicole Groult was an eccentric-looking lady, about five feet five, with reddish hair and a face that had been painted by a good artist with a sense of humor. She was, I guess, about forty, and had had a very slim figure. She wore simple little silk dresses with a belt tied in her natural waistline. This was the height of eccentricity, since nobody had worn their belts above their hips for several years.

Monsieur Bocher made an appointment for me to see Madame Groult. We talked a bit about nothing much except that I was determined to design and had nothing whatever to show her. Very quickly she said, "Come on in. I like young people."

I was hired for 500 francs a month, about \$20, just what I'd gotten in my first Paris job. I told her I didn't want any salary, just to be allowed to make about fifteen dresses without interference. She insisted on paying me something and I went to work.

It was May, the latter part. She was just about to start on her new collection, which had to be finished for the buyers in July. I suppose she let me in because Main Bocher must have told her I knew Americans in Paris, and also be-

cause I had worked for Macy's and Lord and Taylor—and the Maison Groult was not being very successful with Americans. The clientele was mostly French. The clothes really didn't have enough detail to attract manufacturers. I think some new money had just been put in by a gentleman who hoped to build the house up.

Every afternoon for the first couple of weeks we looked at collections of materials. We were Madame Groult, George, her assistant designer, and myself. Every designer in Paris was busy doing the same thing. The salesmen from Rodier and Bianchini and Ducharne, and all the fabric manufacturers, large and small, came around with suitcases full of large samples.

We looked through all of them and every time any of us liked anything we checked it. That meant that a piece of it was sent in on memorandum. This consummation devoutly to be wished by every designer does not as yet exist for the couturier in America.

It means simply this: the fabric house sends you whatever material you like in hopes that you may make a dress out of it. You, the designer, have a large room which becomes filled with piles of every kind of stuff that pleases your fancy. You use whatever you like and return all the rest.

If you are a big designer in Paris, Vionnet, Patou, Lanvin, you not only can select what you want, but you tell the fabric manufacturer ahead of time what material you are going to want. The manufacturer then makes it and you use it, or not, just as you please after you see it.

Nicole Groult was not in a position to dictate to the fabric manufacturers. It didn't matter much to me, or to her, I think. We selected hundreds of materials out of which we might make clothes.

When we had seen the fabric salesmen, the trimming people flooded in. We selected all the buttons and belts and buckles we liked and got samples of them to have on hand.

Nicole Groult never worked before two-thirty. Neither did George. When we got to the designing, I used to go in the morning because nobody was around, and I could have the materials and models and mirrors to myself.

George worked entirely from sketches. He was a good sketcher if not a particularly talented designer. He had rather theatrical ideas which looked more exciting on paper than in the flesh. Madame Groult could neither sketch nor cut as far as I was able to make out. She sometimes brought in very rough little pencil marks, which she explained to the fitter who seemed to get her ideas and make up what she wanted.

Often I think she simply selected a bolt of material and told the fitter what she wanted without either rough sketch or draping. Perhaps George sketched for her sometimes.

All over Paris in the month of June every dressmaking establishment was busy going through the same motions. I understand that Patou used to select his fabrics and tell the heads of his workrooms what line he wanted in the clothes for the season. The fitters would then retire and make muslins. Patou looked over the muslins, changed them, gave exact material and color, supervised fittings, and you had a Patou collection.

The fitter, the *première* as she is called in France, is a most important person in any dressmaking establishment. Very often the French *première* is the actual designer, as in the case of Patou. Patou stood, I think, in the place of a stylist, but a functioning one, to his *premières*.

In Nicole Groult's the *premières* had to decide for themselves how to cut George's sketches and the ideas of Madame

Groult. I worked every known way that season, trying to find out how I best could develop my ideas. The method I afterward took to is that used by Vionnet.

Vionnet has a half-sized wooden mannequin on which she cuts patterns. Her *premières* then make full-sized patterns from the small ones. I don't know whether or not Vionnet sketches.

Many designers work entirely from sketches, leaving the whole decision of the final cut to the *première*. It is my belief that designers who work that way are limited by the imagination of the *première* to such an extent that their designs often fail of complete fulfillment.

There seems no reason why something as perfectly flat as a tailored suit should not be designed on paper. I do most tailored and sports clothes on paper. Also, if one knows cutting and is repeating and changing something already designed, it can be done on paper. But all new cuts and, I think, really new lines come out of the material. If a designer is blessed with a super-*première* all is well. If a designer is not so blessed, she herself had better know how to cut.

There is, of course, still another method of designing. You take a bolt of material and a woman, and cut, pin and drape her into a finished dress. My impression is that few professional designers use the method. It is the method which the public wishes to think designers use. Few, if any, designers can afford to ruin yards and yards of expensive material. One must know before slashing into a bit of gold brocade at \$20 a yard just how it is to be cut. To design by cutting on a person is the most wasteful thing in the world. Not once in a million does a dress come out exactly as planned in advance.

Even when one cuts muslin patterns and corrects them before cutting in the material, there are changes which often

necessitate throwing out half the dress. Also, inspirational draping usually leads to hacking up and cutting off-the-grain of the material. If material is not cut in accordance with the weave, it hangs in every direction and just won't go where you want it to. It pulls in here, hangs out there, and there is hell to pay.

If a designer is working on theatrical clothes where only the effect matters and the dress doesn't have to stand up under close inspection, he can be as quickly inspirational as he likes. If he is working on some rare individual woman who will stand the long hours really necessary to draping a dress correctly on her figure, okay.

In my experience most women want to know what they are going to get before they buy it, and they don't like to stand for fittings. The minute you have made a sketch you can just as well prepare the fittings in advance. I also find that everyone who does special designs for customers, sold from sketches, instinctively uses tried and true cuts for fear of getting into some unforeseen trouble in making the dress.

In working out really new designs, the perfect subject is the hired mannequin. She is paid to stand up or sit down when she is told. She cannot open her mouth and disconcert you while you're finding out what the hell you are going to do with a neckline. She cannot suddenly decide that the chosen material is too stiff or too thick.

At any rate, the order established by all the French couturiers is to give the idea, by word, sketch, or pattern to a première. The première then makes a complete pattern for the mannequin who is subsequently to show the finished dress. The designer sees the muslin, approves or changes. The garment is then cut in the final material.

When a designer first decides what she is going to make, the fun, as you can see, only begins. The pattern may turn

out according to the original idea, the dress cut in the material may or may not.

Madame Groult, George, and myself used to assemble about three every afternoon, so the premières could bring in our newly cut dresses. Sometimes they looked swell. Other times they looked awful.

George and I decided that Nicole never put any backs in her dresses. She thought up the outline and the front and forgot to discuss the back with the première. So usually the material just went around and covered up the nakedness under it. George and I took to attacking Madame Groult for having no backs. She was very pleasant about it all and paid very little attention.

She tried to help us when we made something awful. Once I had three frights come out in a row. I probably looked as ill as I felt because she hastily told me to wait and see how I felt when I did fifteen bad dresses at once.

The worst trouble George had was that he'd make very beautiful sketches on women nine feet high. When the dress was cut in normal proportion, it was all chopped into little fiddling bits.

Madame Groult and I only had one set-to. It was on the matter of the waistline. Madame Groult had a way of taking dresses which looked wrong off the mannequin and putting them on herself. Madame Groult, as I have indicated, had been very thin but was now acquiring a small tummy.

Waistlines were by way of indicating a return to normal in 1928. Groult had not only always worn normal waistlines but had shown them in her collection. Her figure was getting to the point where the normal waistline was not as becoming as it had once been.

I like normal waistlines. I started to put them on my

clothes. Madame Groult took to putting my normal-waisted dresses on herself and lowering the waistline. I took exception to that.

"But, Madame Groult," I argued, "You have had normal waistlines for years. Why do you want to stop now, when they are just about to come back into style?"

"If everyone else is going to have them, why should I?" she snapped. "I'm sick of them."

I think one of the things which determines the life of a dress designer is how much she designs for herself. If the designer cannot get objective about clothes, she is limited to a large extent in the duration of her success. Nicole Groult always designed for herself and sold it to what public she had.

Schiaparelli has always, in my opinion, designed for herself. Vera Borea, of short-lived fame, designed for herself. Vionnet probably never designed for herself in her life. She is the exact opposite of the Vionnet model type. She is short and plumpish. I wouldn't be surprised if Chanel, when she had her great success, was designing for herself. Chanel was obviously too intelligent a woman to continue that too long. Her designs, however, have never had their first great integrity since long waists went out and femininity came in.

If a designer designs for herself, she has as big a success as there are people who are built like her and who feel just as she does about clothes. The minute she loses her figure, her designs are lost to the young people growing up. She may retain an ever aging clientele. Finally, they go other places in search of youth—or they die.

Through six weeks of pain and pleasure, the collections of the French designers evolved, Nicole Groult's with the rest. The only reason those collections get finished in July is for the benefit of the visiting buyer.

Years of work and miles of material are sewed up, ultimately to clothe the international private clientele of the Parisian couture. First the stores and manufacturers, the small dressmakers and the tourists of the world are let in to steal what they can, and buy what they can't steal.

I don't believe there's ever been a real designer in France who gave a whoop in hell what any American or German or South American buyer thought of her clothes. The manager of that designer worries and makes the designer worry as best he may.

Just how most of the designers react to pressure, I don't know, but Nicole Groult gave me one reaction. Her business may not have been large. Her bills may not even have been paid, but I am sure what she told me would have been the same if she had been Chanel herself.

After the collection was finished and shown to the buyers, who didn't come in any number nor buy in quantity, I decided something should be done. I reviewed the situation and went to Madame Groult with a number of suggestions. She listened politely. The models were badly sewed up. They didn't fit the girls they were made on. The salespeople were phlegmatic. Nobody ever heard of her house. Why not do this and that, and she might have quite a good business.

Madame Groult looked me quietly in the eye and said, "I have diamond bracelets up to here," indicating her elbow, "would I be any happier if I had them to my shoulder? I'm going to the Riviera tomorrow for a rest."

The French designers have fun. They are intelligent, artistic, wide-awake people. They are trained to make beautiful clothes for beautiful women. They do it according to the old traditional methods of designing and dressmaking for a wealthy clientele.

Long may they wave!

9 . *It Creaks*



AT THIS point, I nearly died in the American hospital in Paris. I'd been putting off having my tonsils out for months. The Groult collection finished and shown, Madame Groult gone off to the Riviera, I decided to take two days off and get into working condition.

I repaired to the hospital where a French gentleman who was not used to these operations and had never done one there before, cut a large piece out of my throat along with the tonsils. About three hours after the operation, I was choking to death. I remember a flock of doctors rushed into the room, led by a rather excited nurse. After that, everything disappeared until such a time as the nurse thought well to tell me that I had almost bled to death but everything was okay now.

When I left the hospital, a week after, I needed a rest—and I wanted to think. I invited myself to visit the family of a French boy I'd known these many years in Paris. Presently, after going south from Paris for five hours or so, I arrived in Poitiers and was driven from there to his family house in Lussac-les-Chateaux.

All I saw was a single long street with the inevitable stone and cement houses set tight to the curb on either side. Penetrating a dark, narrow hall, stumbling through its fifty feet of passageway, I emerged into a bushy garden, an acre of it. There I spent two weeks reflecting.

In July, 1925, I had arrived in France to discover the chic monde and learn how to design for it. By August 1928, my exploring was complete. I knew that, given the right set-up, I could design beautiful and expensive clothes for some kind of women.

The chic European monde, alas, was not to my taste. It took me three years to find it out, but I finally knew, once and for all, that the life of the leisured European classes bored me. I hated to know what I was to do at every hour of every day. I didn't care for drinking cocktails in the right place after swimming at the right beach. Ascot was ridiculous with its flowered hats and lace dresses.

No sense trying to design clothes in Paris for a group of

people whose lives were nothing to me, although everything was arranged there so that I could. I could, that is, with a little work and trouble, find my spot, as Vionnet had found hers and Molyneux his, and Schiaparelli and Marcel Rochas and Alix, still unheard of, were to find theirs.

All the craftsmen of France were ready to make my buckles and buttons and sew up my designs, beautifully, carefully. All the fabric manufacturers of France would be only too pleased to make my materials.

There was the rub. What could be found in America to equal the set-up which had kept the couturiers of Paris in business for generations, which was to see them through a world depression, which had made a legend of their art so that all women wanted it?

The business of making expensive clothes to order has never been a really profitable one per se. By profitable, I mean steadily so. A couturier may make a great deal of money in prosperous times. At the first hint of a depression, he finds himself stuck with an enormous overhead and no sales.

The French do have a way of saving in good times and can usually see themselves through a few years of depression. Nevertheless, no one who has as expensive an establishment as the important Paris couturier, Chanel, Patou, Vionnet, could possibly survive a long depression without help.

It must also be considered that a couturier is, at bottom, an artist. Artists have a well-earned reputation for being highly impractical, in a money sense. They would, the best of them, prefer to ply their art in peace and whether they make money or not is of secondary importance.

Your couturier's art is so very fleeting, so entirely a thing of the minute, that it must be sold hot off the platter or it is worthless. I cannot design a very beautiful dress this year

which someone will suddenly discover ten years later and pay me a large sum of money to possess and hang on the wall. My whole success as a dress designer depends on my feeling this very minute what my clients are going to want tomorrow and providing it for them. The next day their lives may change and I must again provide exactly the right answer or they will leave me to starve.

What arrangements had been made by man to preserve the French couturier through thick and thin, to continue so profitably, so unabatingly the great French tradition? For whom has it been worthwhile to keep the world believing that all beautiful clothes are designed in Paris and all the world wants them?

For Mr. Rodier, and Mr. Bianchini, and a number of the richest gentlemen in France. They were born, perhaps, with a passion to make fabrics, a desire as great and unceasing as Vionnet's urge to make clothes. The results of their passion can be counted in billions of francs. They developed not only their fabrics but have kept up the entire superstructure necessary to selling those fabrics to the whole world for a long period of time.

The couturiers of France have help, in bad years and in good, from the fabric manufacturers. The French couturiers are virtually owned by the fabric manufacturers. Getting control, financially, of a dressmaking establishment is quite easy for a fabric manufacturer. Dressmakers, to all intents and purposes, are never paid by their private clients. Dressmakers need an enormous amount of credit from the manufacturers from whom they buy.

There is probably not a couturier in existence who could not be closed up by some fabric manufacturer if the manufacturer just saw fit to collect what is owed him at the mo-

ment. The French fabric manufacturers don't care to close up the couturiers. On the contrary, they keep them going.

The Paris couturiers are the display windows for French fabrics. For every good model of a given fabric designed and made by a top designer, the fabric house will sell many times the model's value in yardage. They sell the material not only through the designer's house but through the other houses who copy the model, in Paris, England, South America, the world.

The French fabric manufacturer doesn't have to hire people to tell him what kind of fabrics to make. He works directly with the designers of clothes. He makes such and such for Vionnet, something else for Molyneux, another sort of thing for Schiaparelli. Of course, he keeps Vionnet in business. She may make money in her house one year, lose it the next, but as long as she retains her following of private, chic women, she will be kept going.

And what if Vionnet makes a badish collection one year? She is kept going because everyone knows that any designer has an off season now and then. But let her make four bad collections in a row. Finis. Collect the bills. Good-bye Vionnet. Give the credit to a new one. Build her up.

What does Vionnet get out of this? She gets a salary with leeway. What did Patou get? He got his gambling debts paid when he was very successful. There came a year when the rumor floated up to Paris from the Riviera that they'd let Patou be put in jail because he couldn't pay his gambling debts. The fabric manufacturers had gotten a bit weary of gambling, and anyway, Patou wasn't having such a success. Pull yourself together, Mr. Patou, or we'll collect your bills.

Surely Captain Molyneux has all the credit he needs and to spare. What if he were not to pay his bills this year—or even next? Think of the chic women wearing his clothes.

Rodier sells him some grey wool. Molyneux makes a suit of it. It's a success. Orders for the wool from England, orders from the United States. One can't even get the wool in that particular shade of grey. Why should Rodier care whether Captain Molyneux ever pays for the wool he used? Charge it up to advertising. Buy a new car, Captain Molyneux, but don't forget that if you should ever make enough bad suits in our wool, we'll collect.

Do the designers worry about that? Why should they? They do what they want. They're artists. They want to design beautiful clothes for beautiful women. Rodier and Bianchini and Ducharne, and all the fabric men in France are back of them. Life is a lovely thing, so long as you can turn out the designs.

Paul Poiret turned out the designs once. He swept over Europe. He was the rage. He had everything he wanted. Fifteen years later he was borrowing ten francs from old acquaintances in the Café de la Paix. He couldn't turn it out anymore.

Well, Poiret had his fun, and Patou had his. Vionnet will be thrown out one day. But it's all a chance one is glad to take if one has an irresistible desire to dress people. However, I realized in my garden in Lussac, that there wasn't any sense of Elizabeth Hawes taking a chance with the fabric manufacturers of France.

There wasn't any sense because I didn't thoroughly understand and sympathize with their primary clientele of chic Europeans. The whole French legend rested on a group of attractive females whom I had helped to publicize, had followed about England and the continent to some extent, but who seemed to me to be thoroughly boring people.

Maybe only the French do know what's going to be chic next year. Possibly nobody else will ever know. What did I

care? The system of keeping the whole structure upright made me sick.

Let them give the Duchess de X her clothes, if she hasn't the money to pay any more. Give them to Madame de Y and Madame R. In 1927 I sat with four other people in Paris and we made a list of the ten supposedly best-dressed women. Some one of us knew that at least eight of them were dressed for little or nothing by some couturier.

If La Duchess de X is dressed by Molyneux in a certain little print, all of those women who are trying like mad to be the Duchess de X will rush to Molyneux and probably buy the same dress. Who cares whether she pays? They pay. Rodier will give the silk for her dress, and Molyneux will make it for nothing. Mrs. R and Mrs. Y and Mrs. Z will come and get one, and so will Bergdorf Goodman, and Hattie Carnegie and Weinstock. They'll pay.

Let the French be impolite to the foreign press. Let them invest in foreign fashion magazines if they choose. Let them keep their prices up. Let all French fashion and style be shrouded in mystery. Let them try to cater to American buyers and cheapen their designs for what they conceive to be the American taste.

Let all the fashion reporters on earth feed on the great tradition of French dressmaking. Let them try to put it over for ever and ever on the public. Let all the advertising departments in the United States pretend that all the things they have for sale are French, that all women want them.

It can't go on forever. The edges were cracking even in 1928. I'd watched the manufacturers all come to Paris and buy the same clothes. I'd watched the made-to-order American tourists buy them too. I saw Bergdorf Goodman and Hattie Carnegie take home those same models to copy expensively.

Things were getting more and more confused. In New York in 1928, you could meet one lady in a Chanel she'd bought on the rue Cambon for \$200. She could meet a lady who'd bought the same dress at Hattie Carnegie for \$250. That lady could meet another lady who'd bought the same Chanel at Lord and Taylor for \$59.50. And there were the other ladies who also bought the same Chanel, well, maybe not the same material, but the same design, for \$19.75 or \$10.50.

And quite soon, although the original material for the dress came from Rodier and cost \$6.50 a yard in France and \$9.50 a yard in America, one began finding the very material right at B. Altman for \$3.50 a yard. And in the wholesale trade it was to be had anywhere from \$1.95 to \$2.50. The American fabric manufacturers might not be able to create, but they certainly could copy.

It was becoming futile for Bergdorf and Carnegie to spend thousands of dollars for French models to copy, made-to-order, for their customers in New York. Every manufacturer could buy the same thing and make it in mass production. An expensive shop can't get \$250 for the same shaped dress which can be reproduced for \$25. Nobody is going to pay \$6.50 for a material they can have copied for half the price.

The American manufacturers, such as Weinstock, had been coming to Paris twice a year for a long enough time. The copyist and designers they brought with them were learning to design from looking at thousands of collections of French clothes.

More important, they were learning just to look at the clothes and take bits of them. Out of the bits they designed things for life in America, things for thousands of women

who were not chic and never would be in the true sense of that term.

More and more often, working with the American buyers, I heard the complaint, "This stuff is no good for us. Why don't they make some good afternoon dresses? Why don't they design more sport clothes? We can do better than that ourselves."

While I was designing at Nicole Groult's, one Amos Parrish arrived in Paris and called on me. Amos Parrish was one of the bigger promotion guys of the mad '20's. He heard of me through the *New Yorker*. While I was quietly following the chic life the *New Yorker* had risen to fame and made me a little famous in its wake.

Perhaps he meant to offer me some sort of reporting job. I don't know because he was too bright to get to that point. He dug enough out of me to realize that I was going on designing clothes. After we had chattered for a while, he left me, saying, "Why don't you come home to America to design? America needs designers." The remark kept coming back into my mind as I cogitated in Lussac.

One didn't need to be clairvoyant in France in 1928 to know that something was going to happen to the old French legend. It was still serving its purpose. The clothes were still selling. The fabrics were still selling. The French and all their mouthpieces were still insisting that all style and fashion were Parisian.

But they were being overtaken by something more powerful than their subtlest publicity. They were being overtaken by mass production. They did not design for mass production, or for mass consumption. They designed and produced for the world of chic.

The French were doing themselves in by selling the manufacturers. They were undermining themselves with their

real clientele, the made-to-order lady, in foreign countries by allowing the snob element and a great deal of the beauty of their individual designs to disappear in mass production.

I couldn't hope nor did I want to set up business under the old French system. It creaked. To an American it was anachronistic. There was something decayed about the whole of Paris.

Paris was not gay. Paris was the saddest place on earth. The world of chic which had its base there was gay. The rest was grim beyond words. The men and women who worked for the chic monde were not gay.

One Sunday afternoon's walk on the Champs Elysées, away from the world of chic, winding in and out among the mass of the people in their somber black holiday clothes, was enough to throw a seeing American mind into depression deeper than any we have yet survived. Those little old underfed faces on six-year-old children were not a pleasant sight. Their parents had hands worn out with carefully sewing up beautiful clothes, painstakingly making fine metal buckles, carrying heavy trays of delicious food.

Those parents are now upsetting the world of chic. They've decided they want vacations with pay, enough food for their children, central heating and baths. When you order a bolt of material from France in 1937, you never know whether you're going to get it. The patient weavers of Lyons have decided it is no longer going to be cheaper for the fabric manufacturers to keep them at their hand looms. They are going to be paid—or the world of chic can go without its fine fabrics.

It was all there to be seen in 1928, even that depression which has proved the instability of all legends. Hitler was planning right then to tell the Germans they didn't need French clothes or materials or anything which wasn't Ger-

man. Mussolini was already beginning to convince the Italians that they should be Italian. If the old Roman fabrics were good enough for Caesar, they are good enough for you.

Various South American countries were getting into that economic jam which resulted in banning the export of their money. No more rich South American buyers for Paris. England was only a few years from the "Buy British" campaign. There are plenty of good clothes designers in London.

It's lucky I didn't want to be a French designer. If I had, I'd be sitting in Paris today worrying over the facts of life. I'd be wondering, along with the rest of the couturiers, whether or not I shouldn't transplant myself to America, how soon Mr. Hitler would be sending a long range shot into my chic establishment. I'd be bothered over whether my chic world was not dwindling in numbers as well as in importance.

I would know, as all the world should know, that many many beautiful clothes are designed in the houses of the French couturiers. I might never have realized fully, what I suspected in 1928 and have since proved, that all women do not want and cannot use those clothes.

I am very glad that my reflections in an acre of garden in the center of France made me decide to come home to New York. After my two weeks, I arose to my feet, returned to Paris by the first train, got rid of my apartment, packed up my clothes, and sailed back to America.

I had simply concluded that, if the French could make clothes eminently suited to chic Europeans, there was every reason to suppose that beautiful clothes could and should be designed in the United States for whatever kind of woman lived there. Eight years of designing in the United States have taught me that it can be done, for a made-to-order clientele. I have learned why it is seldom done for the ready-made lady.

PART II

BUY AMERICAN

*"All American women can have
beautiful clothes."*



THERE is a clothing legend in the United States as well as in France. Ours is based on that old theme song, "All men are created free and equal" . . . they are entitled to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The proudly American clothing boast is that *all* Ameri-

can women can have beautiful clothes. It goes along with the other legends such as that all boys can get to be President, all children get a good education, and everyone in the United States has "an American standard of living."

The reason that all American women can, supposedly, have beautiful clothes is that we are the only country in the world which can produce garments in masses. Any woman in America can buy a Chanel dress for whatever amount she has to spend, from \$3.75 to \$375. Since the pursuit of French clothing is traditionally the pursuit of happiness in the feminine sex, all American women should be happy.

Lest the American woman become too happy about the solution of her primary want, and rest quietly on the benefits of mass production, Fashion has taken unto himself the French legend and amplified it a trifle. He moved over here from France when he noticed that mass production was going to develop into big money. Formerly he had gotten on in a small way by making Marie Antoinette change the shape of her hat every day and just playing little jokes of that kind on the upper classes. Marie had her head chopped off and so couldn't use any more hats.

Later that boor, Louis Philippe, ascended the throne and Fashion perceived that a new era was commencing. Upon due consideration, he came to the United States and was naturalized. His original coat of arms said beneath it: "All beautiful clothes are designed in France and all women want them." To this he appended: "Beautiful clothes change regularly every six months."

Fashion did this because he saw that, if clothes could be gotten out by the thousand for very little money, something would have to be done to make women buy a lot of them or there would be no profit in the new arrangements. Whereas in the old days, Lucinda paid \$175 for her black dress which

she then wore for ten years, now Mabel was supposedly going to be able to get a satisfactory black dress for \$15.75. Mabel must be made to get ten black dresses instead of one.

So Fashion, who had only lightly glossed over style in the nineteenth century, decided to make a super-human effort to take it over entirely. He has so far succeeded that the word "style" is, practically speaking, out of fashion.

Fashion was in control of nearly everything connected with women's clothing when I stepped off my boat from France in September, 1928. I neither knew or cared.

New York was wonderful. The climate invigorated me so after Paris that doing four times as many things seemed only half as much trouble. Even the fact that I had to pay just as much rent for one room and a bath in Greenwich Village as I'd had to pay for an apartment and garden in Paris didn't discourage me.

Cheap American food was disheartening, but there wasn't much time for eating it anyway. Bathtub gin after French wine was fortunately disagreeable enough to my palate to save me a good many headaches.

I had to discover New York. I had never lived there. I'd shopped there and danced there and gone to the theatre there. I thought that I came from New York, but actually, I knew very little about it. Moreover, I had missed the inception of "prosperity." I assumed, as a good many other people did, that New York in 1928 was New York forever.

Except for the superficial aspects of prosperity, perhaps it was. The set-up of the clothing business remains practically identical now as then. This was, of course, my chief pre-occupation. For whom and how was I to design clothes?

To my knowledge there were no couturières in existence, with the possible exception of Jessie Franklin Turner. She made tea gowns of her own design to order. Everyone else

sold copies of French models, made-to-order or ready-made according to your choice or pocketbook.

I did not, in any case, return to New York with the faintest idea of setting up my own business. Amos Parrish told me America needed designers and I assumed that I would find a place without much trouble.

I had just shed the French Legend and my task was to prove its lack of validity. There seemed to be only two choices, one to go to Seventh Avenue and design for a wholesaler who would sell my clothes to stores, the other to find a place to design for a private clientele.

The great American public, as always, divided itself into two groups, the made-to-order ladies and the ready-made ones. A more apt division in the United States would perhaps classify the women who buy clothes as expensive and inexpensive customers. Many women here who could afford to have clothes made-to-order buy very expensive ready-made clothes. This is largely due, I believe, to the absence of real couturières. It may be further due to the rush of life in America and the resulting psychology of our women in reference to clothes.

In any event, as I saw things in 1928, the made-to-order or expensive lady had her specialty shops, the ready-made or inexpensive lady her department stores. One big difference between a specialty shop and a department store is that the former has carpets on the floor and the latter has none. The difference between a specialty shop and a couturier is that the couturier sells only his own designs and those only made-to-order. The specialty shop sells anybody's designs, either made-to-order or ready-made. The department store sells everyone's designs, ninety-nine percent ready-made, and always fairly inexpensive.

Some department stores have made-to-order depart-

ments. These, in general, lose money and are maintained only for the advertising and prestige which the store gets from them. The greatest difference between a department store and the average American specialty shop is one of price first, and second, and far more important, *Service*.

Whatever a specialty shop sells is comparatively expensive. This is because they sell real service and real service costs a lot in America. A good deal of what a woman buys in a specialty shop is not included in the purchases afterward delivered to her house. But it is balm for the soul and worth a good deal of money if you have it.

First, when an expensive lady goes shopping for clothes, she buys space. She gets a place for her chauffeur to park nearby so she won't have to wait endlessly after her fitting for him to get the car from another block. Her specialty shop, if it is lucky, or thoughtful, places itself in a geographical location where she will not have to spend an hour getting through three blocks of traffic to the door. The made-to-order lady should not have to smoke seven cigarettes and tap her foot a thousand and fifty times while a half hour elapses between 57th and 56th Street. She does not have to worry how high the taxi meter goes, but there are other considerations in avoiding traffic, like nervous indigestion.

Next, when this lady arrives at the shop, she buys plenty of room to sit and look at the clothes which she may purchase. She buys a comfortable chair, and she buys service. She doesn't want or get just any salesperson, she gets the one she is used to, who understands her and her problems.

She gets the unlimited time of this salesperson who will send an unlimited number of people out to shop for special colors and materials for her dresses. She gets special designing done for her if she wants it. She refuses to take the

sketches if she doesn't like them. It is all charged up to overhead and so, ultimately, to her.

If she is a made-to-order expensive lady, she buys fittings, whatever number are necessary to make her clothes turn out to be her very own. While in the fitting room, she takes up the time of models who show her more clothes she may or may not buy. Sometimes she has a rip in a glove mended while she waits.

Sometimes she has a drink of water, or a drink of Scotch. Often she asks for a cigarette while she passes an extra half hour talking to her salesperson until it's time to go to the next appointment. She is not hurried while she fixes her hair and puts on her make-up before she leisurely leaves.

The made-to-order lady not only has an opportunity to buy her choice of style and fashion, she may also buy it at her convenience and comfortably. She pays for it, but seldom more than it is worth.

What would the inexpensive ready-made lady not give to be able to settle into a quiet corner with an understanding salesperson and choose for herself just what she really wants and needs? But her fate is the nerve-racking business of squeezing herself into a five by eight fitting room to try on a lot of things she doesn't like anyway, and she knows on walking into a department store, that she can't get navy blue in the fall, which is enough to unsettle the most stable stomach.

The department store offers services, too. They talk a good deal about them, that is. But what are they? Onto a \$15.75 dress, the store does not add the price of an excellent salesperson, or even enough of an inferior grade to spend more than a few minutes to each customer. If there is one comfortable chair to every fifty department store customers,

that is a very high average. There are no cigarettes, few drinks of water, and no Scotch.

All right, the ready-made lady can't pay for it, so that's that. I assumed, in 1928, that what came home to her in its package was exactly what she did pay for.

In 1928, at specialty shops such as Hattie Carnegie and Thurn and Bergdorf Goodman, I saw service being given and paid for. I saw some beautiful clothes, all French models. I saw good workmanship and good quality and that business was booming. Without asking, I felt quite sure they didn't need me. All their beautiful clothes had been designed in France and, apparently, all their customers wanted them. Their customers looked happy and satisfied.

Getting jostled around in department stores, looking over the possible purchases of the ready-made lady, forced me to the conclusion that I just didn't understand the majority of the American public. Most of what I saw I wouldn't have worn at any price. It was bad in quality and cheated on cut. It was Vionnet's best model with a bow added to it for the purpose of attracting the American eye. It was junked up and tricked out and tawdry.

It was anything but chic, and it lacked style. I was assured that it was fashionable because the ads said so and everyone was buying it. Anything new that enough people buy is fashionable in a world of mass production.

I reflected on the two publics for which I might design and I concluded that, while I came from the middle class, I no longer had any affinity with them. If what I saw them wearing was the physical proof of America's fine and satisfactory mass production, then I and mass production were never going to get along.

In addition to what I saw in the department stores, I had another fright about the wholesale clothing business. My

dealings with Weinstock were fresh in my mind. I had gazed upon the bosses of American mass production in Paris. I considered them a bunch of thieves. I had sold sketches to their designers to such an extent that they were merely copyists in my estimation. I could not be under the illusion that any manufacturer would want original designs.

In any case, I had carefully trained myself to design individual clothes to be made-to-order. Discussions with my friends, as I reviewed the American clothing field before entering it, confirmed my suspicions that, in spite of the services rendered them by specialty shops, there were a number of women in New York who were not satisfied with copies of French models at any price.

There were, and are, three psychological types of women who count in America as far as their clothing wants go. We have chic women, fashionable women, and stylish women here. In France there is only the chic woman to attend to. The rest don't count.

In England there are chic women, as in France, and stylish women, like the Queen Mother. The fashionable woman flourishes in large numbers only in this land of mass-produced clothes. Whatever novelty is bought in large quantity is fashionable where large quantities can be turned out.

Fashion worked fast and hard on the women of America. By spending a great deal of money, he frightened a lot of them under his thumb. He taught a majority of them that they must try to be fashionable.

There are many more would-be women of fashion in the United States than chic women or women of style. The fashionable woman in America has fallen hook, line, and sinker for the French Legend. She scans the news columns eagerly for word of what's new in Paris. She worries about whether skirts will be shorter without reference to the shape of her

own legs. She is horrified if her coat is not the prescribed color and shape.

She not only bows her head in prayer to Fashion's Legend, all beautiful clothes are designed in France, all women want them, and they change every six months, but she is the one who falls for the cellophane wrapper without examining the content. She bought all the idiotic Eugenie hats. She bought a slit skirt when full skirts were just on the verge of popping out all over the place. She didn't stop to think that, above every other reason for not owning one, she couldn't walk easily in a slit skirt.

She is a large part of the middle class with some money to spend on clothes, and most of the nouveau riche with plenty of money to throw around. She tries to be chic and misses. Nobody ever told her about style. She's fashionable, God help her.

I didn't feel so charitable toward her in 1928. I didn't realize it really wasn't her fault. I had yet to learn the ramifications of the fashion business in America. The "fashionable" American woman helped to scare me away from mass production. Even when she buys expensive clothes they are usually ready-made. You've seen her around in a black dress with a bit of white at the neck, two silver foxes and a fake or real diamond pin in her hat.

She is doing her best to give a mass-produced imitation of French chic. Fashion has convinced her that without the leisurely life, without the money and the lady's maid, she can be *chic*. Fashion has convinced her, above all, that quality and cut are not what matter, but his cellophane wrapper.

There are, of course, a few really chic women who live in America. They belong, most of them, to the international group. They learned to be chic in Paris and they keep up the traditions wherever they go. But being chic not only takes a

great deal of money but an enormous amount of time. It practically precludes everything else, even being on charity committees. Half of one's time goes getting chic, the other half being seen that way.

Even very rich American women are usually too occupied to spend twenty-four hours a day at it. The endless number of fittings necessary to have your clothes really right and enough of them to be truly chic irks Americans.

The hours consumed in getting just the right shoe to complete each costume and fitting, and returning and fitting it again, hours so pleasantly passed in Paris, seem an awful waste in New York. Someone always comes along as you are going to your fitting and says, "Let's go to the dog show," or, "How about a cocktail?" or, trying as hard as you can to be chic, you find that, just when you made your fitting appointment, they decided to have a committee meeting for the Milk Fund.

Even the stereotyped chic life doesn't function smoothly in the United States. The minute some smart hotel manager thinks he has got everybody coming to a certain resort, six of them decide it is all the bunk and go to Key West. You never know where expensive Americans are because they go wherever they like.

You find them in Southampton and Newport and Palm Beach, yes. But you find just as many of them with just as good names quietly living along in Southport, Conn., Topeka, Kansas, Chicago, St. Paul, Omaha, Los Angeles, Mexico, Canada, France.

The sons and daughters of the best families are apt to go swimming at Jones' Beach right alongside their servants. They may drive dilapidated Fords and wear old clothes with perfect aplomb. They drink their cocktails at the wrong bars

and live on the wrong side of the railroad tracks if they think its prettier there.

They are descended from the pioneers and they like jazz. They may not be going anywhere in their high-powered cars, aeroplanes or speed boats, but no tradition of chic is going to tell them where they can't go.

This curiously American, reckless disregard for doing "the right thing" has its visible side in clothes. There are a minimal number of American women, to be sure, who go their own way in the matter of covering their bodies.

There are, however, many of them in New York, and more in Boston, a number of dowagers who make no pretensions to chic and no compromise with fashion. They dress as they please, wear their hats on the tops of their heads if they like, use high collars when only low necks are being worn, and generally defy the demon Fashion with the best possible results.

Their daughters were among those who insisted on wearing long full evening clothes when short tight ones were in fashion. They are now busy divesting themselves of their bathing suits and otherwise enjoying life according to their own dictates of comfort.

All of this takes real character and is, in my opinion, the only way worth dressing. It can be done without going too far on the "art" side. It takes courage to defy the deformed thief. Only real people dare do it.

It is the only way of enjoying clothes. It means you really and truly have the right thing to wear at the right time in the right place. Unfortunately, you must be a made-to-order lady to achieve this desirable end. You may, of course, make-to-order at home.

You may make to-order by tearing off all the trimming fashion has added to your dress and, like many little girls

on Broadway in 1928, putting your belt up in your waistline and showing off your figure whether it is fashionable or not. You may just put your hat on the back of your head and show off your beautiful fresh young complexion whether Mrs. de Steele is doing it in Paris or not.

Then you can have a good hearty laugh, two or three years later, when Mrs. de Steele takes up your natural waist and shoves her hat onto the back of her head with the worst possible results. By that time, you have probably decided that too many rehearsals at Roxy's are leaving their imprint and have put the brim of your hat down over your face so that only your pearly white teeth are left to attract an admiring audience.

You can thank God that American men don't know anything about chic, because they just leave you to figure out your own methods of getting them down, regardless of fashion's dictates, or the whims of a French countess. You are creating your own style.

We have an assortment of stylish women and girls in America and are developing more. I see them spread over the campuses of certain colleges. I see them flipping out of big buildings on Wall Street at five o'clock, tapping whatever kind of heels they prefer down the subway stairs.

I seldom see any of them in the movies, but I sometimes see them at the movies, having a good laugh at what stardom chooses to think certain people wear. I see them running up plain little dresses they can't buy, and I see them in my own shop, ignoring the French Legend.

There are not many of them, a few in New York, a few in Chicago, a few in Dallas, a few in Boston. They are perfectly sure of themselves and their position, their clothes and their friends. They are not often photographed or written about.

Some of them were nurtured in the French Legend and all other legends and so saw the futility of doing the right thing. Others of them never heard of any legend and don't know what the right thing is. Some of them are Rosie O'Grady and some the Colonel's Lady.

All of them take what they want in the way of clothes, re-arrange it or have it made-to-order. Some of them have strong, sturdy shoulders, inherited from their Puritan ancestors. Others have narrow, under-fed little shoulders, slightly bent from typing. Whatever their shape, if there is to be an American couture, whether it is produced in masses or one at a time, these are the women who will sustain it, nurture it, use it with pleasure, buy it with a laugh.

They have *style*.

In 1928, I only had encountered those women of style who had money to pay for it. I scarcely knew the rest existed after my sojourn in France. I saw no way of trying to design for any of them in any case. I felt that no specialty shop needed me and no wholesaler wanted me.

I went to consult with Amos Parrish. He had told me to come home. He should be able to point out the first step for a designer if America needed them. When I first came from the disorder, dust, and leisure of Paris offices, to the skyscrapers of New York, I was always struck dumb in my interviews. Amos Parrish had sat on a little chair in my messy cubbyhole chez Nicole Groult. We tipped ourselves back and talked about life.

In New York, I went up dozens of floors to enter into the outside and inside waiting rooms of the vastness which was the American Fashion Business. I finally penetrated the empty squareness of Mr. Parrish's own secluded nook, an acre big, his office seemed, with a mammoth desk, quite bare,

of course, a chair behind it which didn't tip, another small one beside it for me.

"I came home," I said, "To design clothes here."

"What in the world makes you think American women want their clothes designed here?" asked Mr. Parrish.

I gazed out of the window over the tops and into the tops of thousands of buildings which I began to believe were all filled with people asking the same question. Maybe it's all a mistake, I thought. Maybe all the women in America have beautiful clothes, designed by the French, miraculously and satisfactorily reproduced for them by the wholesalers.

I withdrew to the smallness and dustiness of my one room apartment.

I could not answer Mr. Amos Parrish.

It's taken me nine years of very hard work, but now I can answer him.



IT IS now, ladies and gentlemen, October, 1928. It is cold-
ish and crisp and business is booming. We have before us
a depression, a returning prosperity and through it all, some
twenty billion dollars to spend, America's clothing budget
for nearly a decade. This is how the story goes: Nobody, as

Amos Parrish suggested, really wanted a clothes designer who didn't believe in the French Legend. I was unemployed. I was broke. I decided I'd have to get some department store who hadn't already employed me in Paris to give me a salary for doing something, I didn't know what. I amassed a batch of letters from kind friends to various people in the selling end of clothes.

One day I wandered into Scribner's to get a book. There I happened to meet Virginia Vanderlip. It was the Vanderlips who had motored me about in Italy. I roomed next to Narcissa at Vassar. Virginia inquired solicitously after my welfare. I told her I was having quite a bad time. She suggested that her cousin, Rosemary Harden, was interested in clothes and might like to have a shop. I said oh and proceeded to an appointment at Stern Brothers, with Estelle Hamburger.

Fortunately, Miss Hamburger was late. I sat in an outer office waiting. Finally I thought, what am I doing here anyway? I came home to design clothes. This is an advertising department.

For the second time in three months. I arose to my feet and fled. The first time I fled from Lussac, France, to New York. The second time I went to a telephone booth and called Rosemary Harden.

My plans suddenly became very definite. If I could get her to start a business with me, I could design clothes. I was sure some people who could afford made-to-order clothes didn't want French models. We would have a place where they could get our models.

Rosemary Harden was a debutante of the year before. She had good taste in clothes and some creative ability. She wanted to do something besides go to parties. Her father set us up in business.

It was my idea that if you started any kind of business, you should begin somewhere near where you hoped to end. In other words, if I wanted to make really good clothes to order, I would start out making good, and therefore expensive, clothes to order. If I started making inexpensive clothes, I thought probably I'd die making them.

My only pattern for dressmaking was the French *couture*. We proceeded to set up a pocket edition of a French *couturière*.

Our shop, called Hawes-Harden, was on the fourth floor of 8 West 56th St. Some small dressmaker had just failed on the spot and we inherited a gray rug, light beige walls, four fitting rooms and a few workroom tables. Into the showroom came some furniture from the Hardens' attic, a fine carved cabinet with many little drawers for samples, some English tables and chairs, a very large red velvet couch. The room was about twenty-five by thirty-five feet, the street side all windows.

The first fitting room was made into a model room. Clothes must be made and shown on live people, I had learned. We started with two very young girl models. One of them, a Cooper Union graduate, stayed for three years with me. She not only modelled but ran the entire stockroom, did all the ordering of materials, and all the sketching. Quite a girl, that. Now she designs children's clothes for a wholesale house.

The next two cubbyholes were reserved for fitting. The fourth ex-fitting room was the proud container of a *frigidaire*, an electric tea kettle and a tea set. We served tea every afternoon, hot in winter, cold in summer. This was Mrs. Harden's idea and a life saver amid the endless flow of customers, needles and pins.

The back end of the floor was a workroom, about the size of the showroom with a space cut off for a stockroom. Here we subsequently lost money.

Gaily we started out. We made the rounds of the French fabric houses all of whom maintain New York offices. It did not occur to me that anyone made material in the United States. We ordered what we liked for our first collection. Our credit was guaranteed by Mr. Harden. Little did I appreciate the boon. Only later was I brought to any realization of just what it meant.

Our fitter was a dressmaker from Rutherford, a Roumanian woman, big and strong and blond. She received, I think, about \$75 a week. The drapers and finishers were hired by putting ads in the paper. All made-to-order workrooms are set up in the same manner. The chief is the fitter who is responsible for the entire staff of her room and what they produce. Under her are drapers, girls who cut the orders from the muslin patterns which are made for the original design. These drapers cut and prepare the work for finishers who sew up the clothes. Each draper has from four to eight finishers depending on her ability to keep them busy.

Rosemary and I each made models, working with the fitter as chez Nicole Groult. We had about forty things in the first collection which we showed on December 16, 1928. I remember the date very well because that is my birthday. It was my twenty-fifth. I had made a sort of bet with myself, while fiddling about in Paris, that by my twenty-fifth birthday I'd get serious.

I later learned that nobody ever opens a shop of that type except in the early fall. Expensive clothes sell much better in the fall since the women are going to be in town and must have their best clothes for being social. In the spring, everyone is thinking about going to the country. People use

a lot of inexpensive sport clothes. We do nearly two-thirds of our yearly Hawes business in the fall.

Anyway, I didn't know much of anything in 1928 except that I wanted to design clothes and I was doing it. We had a cocktail party for friends and the press. My time in France had taught me the value of the press. I had not yet, however, learned about American press agents. We were our own press agents.

Frank Crowninshield announced at our opening. He was a friend of Mr. Harden's. With him came *Vogue*. *Harper's Bazaar* was there because I knew someone on it. Other women's magazines were there for the same reason. Alice Hughes was brought by someone. Everyone was pleasant and gave us a boost.

We were off. Rosemary and I did all the selling. We had an outside bookkeeper who came in once a week, checked the bills and kept up the books. I ran the check book. The two models did everything else except sweep the floor. That was done by the elevator man. We were a closely knit and not too inefficient organization on the whole.

The fitter did her best to fit as I wanted her to. I think every young designer in America starts with the same problem. Years later, when you are paying out hundreds of dollars for the best fitter you can hire at any price, you hear tales about how your clothes don't fit.

My early fitters come particularly to mind because certainly Hawes-Harden was set up with very definite principles. The first was that we would design everything we sold and that it would be made-to-order of good material, well sewn, and well fitted.

We had our troubles with those principles, since, for one thing, excellent fitters are hard to get and cost a great deal of money, how much I did not realize in the beginning. The

best fitters get a good hundred dollars a week all the year around and are well worth it.

After you have your good fitter, she has to train a complete workroom as the standards of workmanship in New York are anything but high. It took, I should say, a full four years to be able to live up to my first principles in re workmanship.

What I hoped to do in the shop, in selling my designs, was equally clear to me from the beginning. I wanted to thoroughly satisfy the desires of any number of people who turned out to like my way of designing. I did not intend to try and please a fashionable clientele who labored under the delusion that all clothes were designed in France.

We were definitely not in a position to furnish all the service which expensive specialty shops like Bergdorf and Carnegie gave. We were limited in space, lodged on a crowded street. We did not have enough salespeople to go around. We committed every sin of omission possible in the beginning.

We often found it advisable to send the proper flowers with evening clothes to placate the irate customer for being an hour late to dinner in her new Hawes-Harden dress. We kept people waiting hours for fittings, sometimes days.

There was one and only one boast that Hawes-Harden could rightfully make. Nothing which was bought from us could be bought anywhere else at any price. It was not always quite as well made and fitted as some of our competitors in made-to-order clothes, but it was really exclusive!

This, as I had suspected, proved a sufficient inducement to a public wearied and sickened by copies of French models. They came in to look, often remained to buy.

When I showed my first collection in New York in 1928, the general opinion was that, if by any chance I could suc-

cessfully design clothes without going to France to copy, it was just a fluke. At first I argued, but eventually I was too busy making clothes to talk about it.

Perhaps I deserved a reputation for eccentricity. I think not, but I laid the ground for it with my own hand. In the first collection in 1928, I showed a dress with a very long name. It was called "1929, perhaps—1930, surely." It was reminiscent of a Recamier model, high-waisted with a little top hugging the breasts, and a skirt long to the floor and straight in the front, sweeping out behind to make a short train.

Most people smiled politely and appeared to attribute it all to youth and impudence. Skirts were just beginning to go down by dint of dipping in back or on the side. Waists were still around the hips. Yet almost anyone who'd been following style the last few years must have realized that the natural waist was already practically accepted, the long skirt the obvious desire of the women. They had come around to the point where freedom and masculinity were no longer one and the same thing in their minds. They had proven they could be free in the twenties with their straight, shapeless clothes and now they were ready to be feminine again.

The catch was, of course, that although this was apparent in France where there were many designers working out their new ideas and trying them out slowly, in America there were practically no designers. And the American buyers were funny people. They always bought the new version of what they had already seen the season before. They never even looked at the really new things.

Manufacturers and department stores are not in business to experiment. They are in business to make money. In the realm of clothes, they are very happy to have the French

couturier experiment. When the couturier has become certain of what he is doing, when he puts out eighty percent of his collection with natural waistlines, then the stores buy them. Then the manufacturers see and buy them. Then the ready-made lady can have a version of them.

The stupidity of it is that the manufacturers don't try to see, or are incapable of seeing, the seeds of what is to follow in each new collection of clothes. This is the reason that when whole collections of long skirts came out in France in 1930, the manufacturers were appalled. They let it be known that there had been a revolution in fashion, a spontaneous burst of long skirts in the midst of a short-skirted world.

This was sheer nonsense. I had observed it all coming along in France in 1928 before I left Paris. I wasn't making any wild childish bet when I put in my "1930, surely" dress. The manufacturers, as a group, have about as little idea of what's going on in the world as two-year-old children. The French Legend had them by the neck in those days. It still has.

Of course, if the entire population of the United States had believed Fashion's Legend in 1928, I never would have been able to get my business started. It was definitely the fashion to wear French clothes. Fortunately for me there are those women in America as in other countries who don't give a thought to fashion.

If my life had depended on the fashionable woman in 1928, I would have failed. Those of them who got into the shop by mistake used to raise their eyebrows and say to my anatomical clothes, fullish-skirted and natural-waisted almost from the beginning, "Are these smart? I never saw anything like them." Then they would say, "Haven't you any Molyneux's?"

Sometimes a bunch of them would come in together,

rather drunk after lunch. They'd sit and insult the clothes until we just politely suggested that, if they didn't like the designs, there was really no use of wasting their time.

Fortunately, it was all made up for by the people who began to get an affinity for Hawes clothes. Like every couturier, I only make my version of the current styles. I never expected to dress the entire population. A growing number of people discovered Hawes-Harden with cheers.

Most of our original customers were people who had been used to buying clothes in Paris. They were in the process of giving it up. Everything they bought over there was copied and cheapened. They were looking for a couturier who didn't cater to the manufacturers and the department stores. They were looking for something which was original without being eccentric. They were looking for the right clothes for life in America.

For every insult there was, thank Heaven, one of those lovely ladies who took a look and said, "Where have you been all my life?"

The model of "1929, perhaps . . ." went to a young lady from Boston who has probably been wearing it ever since. I find I have quite good luck with Bostonians. They are the kind of people who do what they choose. Some of them choose to wear their hats on the tops of their heads, others wear no hats at all. Some of them wear tailored suits year in and year out. Others of them got into my full skirts the minute I put them out.

Exactly where did those first customers come from? Sometimes I wonder myself. We had friends, both Rosemary Harden and myself and they did it all. They went about talking us up. They brought their friends in for tea. We had cocktails about once a month and lots of young men came. They went out and talked very loud.

I'm not quite sure about talkative men and new clients for young dressmakers. It is said that Chanel got her start after the war by hiring all the ex-aviators to bring in the women. It sounds plausible.

On the other hand, often when a man talks up a dressmaker, the lady to whom he speaks begins to concentrate entirely on what the dressmaker looks like and why the young man is talking her up, why he cares. I know of a few instances where ladies were talked out of coming to Hawes-Harden.

Who talked some of them in, I can't imagine. I never knew, for instance, how Lynn Fontanne got into the shop. One day I came in from lunch and there sat an attractive lady talking to Rosemary about raising rabbits. She stayed on and on, even for tea. We were all in a nervous jitter because we weren't sure whether it was *she*.

Finally she said, "I think I will bring Alfred to look at that dress."

It was the beginning of a very nice experience in my life, and also a somewhat unfortunate one. I adored making clothes for Fontanne. She knew exactly what she wanted. She could wear anything she wanted to because she was so absolutely sure of herself.

The unfortunate thing was that I made my first theatre clothes for her. It gave me a very false idea of stage people and clothes. I thought, after working with Lynn Fontanne, that when an actress dressed for a play, she dressed for the part in the play.

I did "Meteor" for her and the first act dress was supposed to be definitely dull. I put myself out to make something as banal in pink chiffon as ever walked out of a department store for \$29.50. It was what the girl in the play would have worn. It was what Fontanne wanted. It was right.

It had a short skirt although longer skirts were definitely coming in.

Well, everyone raised hell with me for doing such a dull dress. I didn't mind that. What I did mind was that, later in life, I found out most actresses don't even try to dress for any part in any play. They just dress themselves as they like and if they turn out to feel like wearing velvet and fox fur in a camp in Alaska, you can make it or lose the order. I have lately mostly lost theatrical orders. It saves wear and tear on the nervous system.

I might add, for those who don't know, that most theatrical producers think doing stage clothes is good advertising. They expect to get them for next to nothing. Usually they do and usually the clothes look that way. Even when they decide to pay, the producer, the director, the stage-manager, the author and the author's wife are liable to turn up and say all debutantes wear fox fur and velvet in the afternoon. When you insist that all good debutantes wear tweed suits most afternoons, they just look outraged.

They've taught their public to think that debutantes wear fox furs, so there you are. As to the advertising value of a theatrical production, if one is making clothes for women of individuality, the last thing they want is to see one of their dresses on the stage from which it is sure to be copied for \$19.75 at once.

The few actresses I now dress come to me mostly for clothes to use off the stage. This is less wearing. It only involves helping them to be themselves with no manager to step in and say, "All young girls wear white tulle."

Rosemary and I never dressed any young girl in white tulle. We were not the ruffy type. We made bias satin to our hearts content, badly at first, better later.

It was quite pally. Everyone knew me as "Babe" in those

days, and we were Babe and Rosie to our clientele. It threatened to become a little too cute at times. More and more people took to coming for tea. Rosemary often took pity on the errand girl and sent the family Rolls Royce to deliver the clothes.

The Rolls Royce kicked back later. When I had to hire new girls for the workroom, I would ask, "How much have you been earning?" They would preface their answer with the question, "Are you the two girls who deliver clothes in a Rolls Royce?"

We did \$60,000 worth of business the first year and lost \$10,000. I didn't know why at the time. Mr. Harden was the proverbial angel. It seemed to be more or less assumed that everyone lost money the first year they ran a business. When we ran out of money, we'd call up and ask for more.

Then we'd run out into the showroom and take care of another customer. Some of them, like Fontanne, knew exactly what they wanted the minute they saw it. Others wanted to be told what they wanted. My sales technique is based on my idea that couturiers are not miracle-makers.

12 · *Designers Are Not Miracle Makers*



THE job of being a couturier is perfectly simple to state, if not to achieve. The only attribute which a successful couturier has that could possibly be considered odd is his initial desire to make clothes at all.

Given some curious childhood twist or background which

leads him to have a special feeling for the shapes of women's bodies, a desire to drape them, enhance their beauty according to his own ideas, the couturier quickly picks up a feeling for the hang of materials, a preoccupation with their colors.

To these he must add the tools of his trade, the ability to sketch dresses or cut fabrics or both, a knowledge of how clothes are sewn up. If he can combine these with a particular sensitivity to the *Zeitgeist* as it is to be expressed in clothes, he will be successful. Any dress designer must know and thoroughly understand his clientele and their lives. Otherwise he will fail to fulfill his function.

His function as a couturier is to make really stylish clothes which are not eccentric but are in the spirit of the times. This is not complicated when one deals directly with the women who are going to wear one's designs. An important part of the designing is what one discovers while selling.

The couturier must know ahead of time what his customers are going to want. He must prepare it for them, show it to them. If he has understood his clientele, they will immediately recognize the new clothes as what they have been wanting in a mute manner. They will buy them and wear them with pleasure for years.

A good deal of the mystery surrounding the creation of new styles may be attributed, I think, to the French Legend. In connection with all designers being French and working in Paris, a vague idea has been built up that the couturier works in a mystic manner which the ordinary mortal could not hope to comprehend. Nonsense.

The French couturiers and all couturiers are in the constant process of trying out new things, different lines. No couturier goes off into a trance and emerges with something brand new for the next season.

What happens is very simple. You must allow that your

couturier has on hand one collection of clothes which has proven satisfactory to his clientele. This present collection contains sixty percent of things which are merely variations on clothes of the season before. It may even contain eighty percent of such clothes. The colors are different, the fabrics are different, but the lines are fundamentally the same.

A close look at department store ads makes it obvious. Most of the time when you see four brand spanking new original French designs, you will perceive that three of them are that dress you bought last year with another belt. The fourth may look a little odd, a bit unusual. You examine it and decide whether or not you want something a little different or whether you are not perfectly satisfied with a new version of last year's dress.

It is the fourth and slightly different dress which occupies the special part of each couturier's collection given over to experimentation. For, while making up orders for customers, looking over new materials, traveling around the world, the couturier has come to the conclusion that, for instance, although skirts have been very tight, they have been that way long enough. Women must be ready to have full skirts, he says.

He does not proceed to make an entire collection with full skirts. He puts in two or three and watches what happens to them. He finds Mrs. Brown, who is a really charming and intelligent lady of great style, buys one of those dresses. She wears it and reports that not only she likes it, but that she has received many compliments.

At the same time, four other women order dresses with full skirts. Two of them weaken during the fittings. "My hips look too wide," they say. The fullness is taken out from the waist.

"Well," says the couturier to himself, "I can't make all

the skirts full even next season but if four really stylish women out of a hundred liked them this time, then twenty will want them next time." He proceeds on the basis of trial and error to find out what the women are going to want and gives it to them.

This is the routine and the rigmarole and the mystery through which the couturier goes in order to establish in his own mind what the style is going to be. It is not magic. It is work.

The end is not reached with discovering that women want full skirts or high waists. It is not even approached. One must begin by clearly understanding the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times, which is influencing clothes and architecture and painting and politics. The first success of Chanel can clearly be seen to have depended entirely on her complete grasp of the *Zeitgeist* after the war.

Prior to the world war, women had led the major part of their lives within their homes, chiefly in the capacity of housewives. Their social activity was definitely restricted and it was the rare woman who golfed, ran an automobile, engaged in what were considered masculine pursuits.

During the war, a really large proportion of the female population got loose and declared for Freedom. They found that Freedom was incompatible with tight corsets and an emancipated few threw away their stays then and there. A large number of these women became very confused. They thought that to be free meant to be masculine. They tried to make their bodies masculine. First they took up very tight brassieres with which they bound their breasts and flattened them.

They all began looking around for some kind of clothes to conceal their feminine curves. Chanel rose to international fame as the answer to a post-war woman's prayer. Chanel

epitomizes the most hideous period in women's dress. She understood the times and she responded.

She gave these women little chemises to wear. She showed them how, by putting their belts around their hips, they would look straight like boys. They needn't be self-conscious about taking off their corsets. Neither they nor the clothes would have any shape. Carried away with the joy of it all, the women began cutting the hems off their skirts. They never stopped cutting until skirts reached their knees.

No reasonable person could maintain that any one designer, or any hundred designers, could have decided all alone or in conclave to do away with the wasp waist, do away with the breast, do away with the hip, expose the unmentionable leg and be allowed to live. The lives and desires of the women underwent a fundamental change. Chanel happened to show them the clothes for it and to enjoy designing those clothes.

All very well for the old Lucille to say in the twenties, "The designers of today are nothing but creators of chemises." Life was demanding chemises. Chanel was handing them out. First she probably handed out one. The second season, she made six. By the second year, the whole world was making them too.

This is not magic. This is merely understanding, understanding and trying it out. Trial and error, error and trial.

Perhaps because I am so entirely convinced that no designer can function without direct contact with his clientele, I feel that the business of selling clothes should be based on as great a knowledge as possible of one's customers.

I believe no reasonable woman should assume that any couturier can look at her and know instantly what sort of clothes she will wear with pleasure. The business of dressing people does not seem to me to consist merely in making your

customer buy a dress in which she looks well to an abstract eye in the fitting room.

It's the beginning, but it isn't sufficient just to dress the outer woman. Carlyle says that clothes are "warm moveable houses in which we live." To dress satisfactorily, one must know how one wants to live in the house. This practically involves a psychoanalysis of some customers.

The process is something like this:

Mrs. Jones comes in and says, "Dress me."

We can see her plainly, but we don't know a single thing about Mrs. Jones. And the joke is that Mrs. Jones really tries not to tell us anything.

"The suit I have on," she says, "is something I never really wear."

That's lucky, we say to ourselves, because it certainly is unbecoming. Aloud we say, "Do you like suits?"

"Sometimes," she answers and subsides.

"Just what do you need?" we ask.

"Oh, everything," she explains fully.

Is she rich, is she poor, does she go out often or does she stay at home?

"Suppose we look at the collection," we suggest, "then you can pick what you like and we will get an idea what you need."

We look at the collection. A blue dress appears. We say, "That would be a becoming color for you."

"I hate blue," she answers firmly, "but of course I will leave everything to you."

"Perhaps this color red appeals to you?"

"No, I absolutely never wear red. I also have a superstitious aversion to yellow. Then, as I say, I dislike blue intensely."

A bias cut dress walks in. Mrs. Jones hastily draws out

a cigarette. "I'd better tell you at once," she says, "that I can't wear bias dresses. They always go in under my tail."

She rises to let us inspect her tail. We can't find it anywhere. She has none. "But, you are perfectly flat in the back," we exclaim.

Mrs. Jones looks doubtful. "Perhaps I am, but I *feel* as if they go in under my tail."

As a half hour and thirty dresses pass, we learn that Mrs. Jones doesn't like pleats, she likes to play bridge, she hates chiffon, she loves flared skirts, she is in despair because her old dressmaker has gone out of business, her son is seventeen years old and goes to Hotchkiss. We learn almost everything about Mrs. Jones except the essential thing, what does she want to look like in her clothes?

Does she fancy herself as a tall blonde, although she looks to us like a small brunette, or, more important, does her husband fancy her as a tall blonde? Does she go all girlish in the evening and love it, or is she haughty and bored at parties?

"Do you want clothes to wear to the theatre?" we hazard.

"Oh no. I never go to the theatre. We go out a great deal, though."

"To nightclubs?"

"No—dinner mostly."

Then I have tried asking the questions I want an answer to with the following results about ninety-nine times out of a hundred.

"Mrs. Jones, look here. What I want to know is, when you are going to wear this evening dress, will you be trying to appear sophisticated and worldly or do you want to look like your son's sister?"

"Heavens, Miss Hawes, how do I know? Some people

say I look like my son's sister and the other people think I look as if I were a vampire."

"Well, what I want to know is, which do you prefer?"

At this point Mrs. Jones is not trying to hold back. She doesn't know. She doesn't even know exactly where she will wear the dress. She doesn't know just what effect she will be trying to make in it.

It isn't as if she didn't want to make an effect on someone somewhere for some reason. She just has never taken time off to decide what kind of a person she either is or wants to appear to be. Therefore she misses half the fun of buying clothes and makes it just twice as difficult for her dressmaker and herself.

If some lady came in to me (and sometimes they do) and said, "Look here, I'm forty-seven and I have grey hair and look rather severe and forbidding. It is essential to me that on Wednesday, March seventeenth, at eight o'clock, I look thirty-five and very very appealing. I will be in a modern living room with dark gray walls and silver and white furniture. There will be yellow flowers. I am a perfect thirty-six except for my chest which is flat. My breasts droop a little and one of my hips is two inches bigger than the other. What shall we do?" Then I can whip out an answer in the guise of a few possible dresses.

Naturally, most of the time the scene cannot be set, but the rest of it should be told at all times. The rest of it is rarely told and something else happens. If by some chance you or she picks the right dress the first time, then you've got a customer and over a few seasons you can then discover what she really needs.

I do not mean that any good designer cannot look at any woman and say, "The line of this dress will be becom-

ing to your figure and this material and this color will make you look handsome." The trouble is, that is not enough.

Fortunately some women have themselves all analyzed. It's a wonderful pleasure to watch them choose clothes, to help them out. If they see what they want, they recognize it immediately. If they don't see it, they give you the proper tipoff, "It would be that dress," pointing to a red velvet robe de style, "if it were taffeta and had a tight skirt." Right away you see that it is the beguiling neckline and the swish that will do the trick they have in mind.

Other customers slowly give themselves away to you by odd remarks in fittings. "You know that green damask dress you made for me? I *feel* right in that dress."

My goodness, you say to yourself, the girl likes romantic clothes even though she does wear her hair that way. The next time she comes in you say, "Why don't you try having your hair curled lower in the back and cut with bangs over the right eye?"

It's rather fun but it takes an inordinate amount of time. Often, just as you have finally gotten someone into a mad hat by giving it to her and are all set to sell her some silly clothes the next time and make her find out that life is gay, she happens into another dressmaker and is gone like the wind.

I suppose I evolved a lot of these ideas in Paris where time is not money and the French fabric people allow the couturiers to go right on making beautiful clothes as long as they are able to publicize fabrics.

I thank God for the generosity of the Hardens in letting me get my start with all my theories in New York. They treated me to a year and quarter of dreams which I haven't forgotten. They gave me a chance to lay a base and prove

that a certain number of women wanted Hawes clothes sold to them according to my definitions of selling.

In the early spring of 1930, I was rudely awakened to reality. Rosemary Harden decided that life held other things besides selling clothes and she was quite right. Perhaps she also had a vision into the future of trying to run an expensive clothing store through the depression. At any rate, she retired to be married and raise a family.

I suddenly realized that the stock market had collapsed in the fall of 1929 and that now in 1930 I was in the red on the books. Perhaps if I hadn't had a fanatical desire to design clothes, I would have retired myself.

As it was, all I thought was that I'd gotten started and wasn't going to stop without a struggle. The ensuing struggle was primarily centered, for four long years, on cash.

The Hardens sold me Rosemary's half of the business for a dollar. For two months I couldn't find a dollar anywhere. I thought I had covered the possibilities and concluded I was washed-up. I walked a friend, the first I saw after the awful realization came over me. I tried the new idea out on her. I wanted to say it aloud so it would become true.

"I have to close up," I announced. I must have sounded and looked as I felt, horrible.

"How much do you need?" she said.

"I wouldn't dare go on unless I knew where I could find \$10,000," I answered. I was still doing business with mythical calculations.

The next day she called up and offered to underwrite me for what I wanted. I was so inspired, I sold five thousand dollars' worth of stock to someone else and that saw me through the next two years.

Now, said I to me, I'd better really get serious.

13 · *"She's Barred from France"*



NINETEEN hundred thirty was a good year for me. I never get any more serious about business than I have to to keep it going. That was enough to break me down once or twice a year regularly from '31 to '36.

As I look back on France, the most important thing I

learned there was to be in business for my health, at least theoretically. Beginning in 1930, I've had one if not two months' vacation every summer, and three or four weeks off in the winter. I have no diamond bracelets, and if I did, I'm sure my health would be no better.

My first serious step, after Rosemary Harden left me and I found my \$5,000, was to reorganize as Hawes Inc. I then spent a hundred dollars making the shop look like home.

Willy Muschenheim, a modern architect steeped in Viennese lore, taught me about painting four walls in three or four colors. We had two shades of gray, white, and canary yellow. The ceiling was too low and Willy blotted it out with dark blue paint.

Once a lady from *Harper's Bazaar* came into the shop and admired a wire fish bowl which Sandy Calder had given me. "It's no wonder you get on so well," said she, "you have so many clever friends."

Quite right. Bob Josephy made me some aluminum tables with glass tops. We all went to Second Avenue and bought second-hand couches which we covered with blue like the ceiling. The chairs were wire soda-fountain models with blue cushions. Everything became bright and gay and present-day.

I was off again. I electrified my creditors by writing them all notes to say the Hardens had left and that I would continue and they would all be paid some day. I thereupon discovered that the less you tell creditors about paying them, the better they like it. They prefer, in their hearts, to quietly trust in God where dressmakers are concerned. It would have been quite smart of me to have gone into bankruptcy and started clean. But I wasn't brought up to do that, or maybe it's just that money doesn't mean much to me.

My puritanical policies stood me in good stead later on, as the depression got worse. My creditors saw me through it at times when my best friends were entirely too broke.

If my creditors had been paying more attention to me in 1930, they might have been more cautious. It seemed to me that I had about exhausted the channels leading to customers via friends. I wanted to tell everyone about Hawes clothes. I positively didn't have enough money to advertise, but I did.

All the ads went into the *New Yorker* and they were fun. Regal and Leffingwell, the small agency I found to work through, told me, when I said I had written for the *New Yorker*, that I should write my own ads.

I was terrified—like trying out for a new job. It worked beautifully, probably because all the ads went into the widely read *New Yorker*. The copy carried the Hawes flavor well enough so that practically nobody came in from an ad who didn't buy if they had the price.

The spring slid by. I went to Europe and bicycled in the Romanesque heart of France for a month in July. I made my collection and advertised it in the fall. At the end of 1930, I had done \$40,000 worth of business and broken even, paying myself and my fitter a hundred dollars a week salary, average wages to the rest of the staff and workroom.

This taught me a very important lesson. It wasn't necessarily a question of constantly doing more and more volume. I had paid myself \$50 a week, done no advertising, and lost ten thousand on sixty thousand dollars' gross business the first year.

The second year, I spent about \$5,000 on ads, doubled my salary, had a more expensive fitter, and lost no money. We became efficient.

The loss in sales was directly ascribable to the fact that

many of my first customers lost everything in the 1929 crash. The fact that I got by at all, I think, was largely due to picking up a fair number of new customers by advertising, and hiring a fitter who understood my ideas to run the workroom.

So I began 1931 well enough, but I still hadn't made much of a dent in the clothing world. People still said, "Of course you go to Paris every season for the openings," and infuriated me. I went into long endless explanations of how it wasn't necessary to see French clothes to design what American women wanted to wear. Everyone smiled knowingly and seemed to insinuate that I probably had my private sources of French designs.

At this moment the gods delivered into my hands what looked to me like the means of shouting very loud and clear, "Clothes *are* designed in America. All beautiful clothes are not designed in France. All women do not want French clothes."

My motives were not in any sense to undermine the French. I loved them and their country and their food and their clothes. I wanted recognition in the United States for myself and for all designers. I wanted people to say, "The French design beautiful clothes and so do the English and the Americans and lots of other people."

Along came a girl named Mary Bendelarie who was American and had gotten fame by designing and making shoes in Paris. She seems to have passed out of the picture but in those days she had an enormous amount of press. Unfortunately, as I often observed to myself while looking over my own clippings, one can't eat them. I think that Bendelarie was a better press agent than she was manager. People liked and wore her shoes, so she must have been a good designer.

She came to buy clothes. She remained to invite me to show my clothes when she gave her annual shoe show in

Paris. I was planning to go abroad anyway in June. It seemed like an amusing idea and a most excellent way of putting over my point that there were dress designers in New York.

I am largely indebted to Eleanor Shaler for the Paris showing having come off. Shaler is a Hawes stockholder. She is an amazing girl who went to Vassar, danced in the Garrick Gaieties, sang in nightclubs, wrote a book, and, somewhere in among all that, worked in Will Hays' office. She acquired a remarkably good sense of press agenting in the course of her career. She taught me most of what I now understand about press agenting in America.

Shaler said, "It's a wonderful idea. You must do it. And, I think, the time has come for you to have a press agent."

I didn't know much what that meant, but one Selma Robinson had been sitting in the shop by the hour for weeks, looking longingly at Hawes clothes. She was a press agent, as I look back on her, one of the best I've ever met. She was pretty and black-haired and energetic.

I hired her for a sum I could afford because she wanted Hawes clothes. Most of my early employees and stockholders elected themselves to Hawes Inc. Young women would just come in and sit until I finally said, "Why don't you sell," or design, or buy stock, or be my press agent, as the case might be.

Selma was, of course, delighted with the Paris idea. She put out a few stories, had me interviewed once or twice, saying that I was going. Just then Bendelarie whipped away into the night and was gone. I think I got the idea that she wanted me to pay for the whole show. That had not been my first understanding. I was enraged. She left.

I had publicly committed myself to showing clothes in Paris and Shaler and I felt that I must do it or make a liar of myself. There is nothing so undermining in the long run

as those press stories which constantly make the rounds and then turn out to have been sheer imagination.

One afternoon Shaler brought Ruth Morris into the shop. Ruth is the sister of Bill Morris who heads up one of the largest theatrical agencies in the country. This means that he places and makes contracts for numerous stars of the stage and films and radio and is in touch with theatrical and nightclub people all over the world.

Ruth and Shaler and I draped ourselves over the largest couch and discussed my predicament. How was I to show clothes in Paris?

"Bill knows the man who owns Les Ambassadeurs in Paris," Ruth remarked. "Maybe he could arrange something."

So Bill, who scarcely knew me, sent a cable and arranged something, none of us knew just what. I was to present myself in Paris to the manager of Les Ambassadeurs and finish the arranging.

I got together a few clothes, took a boat, and turned up in Paris about the middle of June. Les Ambassadeurs, was, and probably still is, a very good and expensive tea place and nightclub situated in that strip of park which runs up between the Champs Elysées and the Avenue Gabriel, just above the Place de la Concorde in Paris.

I repaired to the office of the manager, on the Champs Elysées. I went into the usual dark entrance hall and found one of those glass elevators which glide slowly, oh so very slowly, up slippery poles to Parisian offices. "Home again," I reflected. "Why did we ever think I could do anything here in a hurry?"

I reckoned without the power of Bill Morris. He'd fixed everything as much as he could have. The owner was British (keep that in mind) and in London, and he'd evidently told

the manager to go ahead and put on my clothes as part of the floor show some afternoon and evening.

The manager was French. He was large and fat and slow but he'd had his orders and I doubt if he thought much about it all, other than to recommend to me that we put on the show July Fourth. It seemed entirely appropriate.

He introduced me to Eddie Lewis, a small dark American youth who ran the floor shows for Les Ambassadeurs that summer. Poor Eddie! Little did he know what he was getting in for as we quickly agreed that I should get programs of the clothes printed, that we would show the clothes the afternoon of the Fourth at tea, although they didn't usually have any show then, and again during dinner at night.

I had a little over two weeks before the Fourth. I decided to plant a few seeds in the press and leave for Geneva to rest and visit and get up my strength for the show.

I had letters with me to a lot of press people in Paris and knew others. I decided one story in the Paris *Herald* would hold me until the week before the show.

I therefore went to present my letter to the editor of the *Herald*, and, just in case I needed it, took along another to some friend of a friend in the advertising department.

The editor received me. "I am going to show American designed clothes at Les Ambassadeurs on July Fourth," I said, and waited for him to jump.

He was a large gentleman with watery blue eyes. He turned them slowly to me. "What do you expect us to do about that?" he asked me in a steely voice.

I gathered my surprise together. "In America, before I left, people thought it was news," I said very clearly.

He didn't say, "We are not in business to give out news." He did say with great finality, "We run a paper in Paris. We

would not care to do anything to which the French couture might object."

"Oh," I observed, and retired hastily to present my letter to the advertising gentleman. It is always the letters you almost don't take along which arrange everything in the end.

I burst in upon a small youngish American, one who had lived for years on the *Herald* in Paris and didn't take life or work too seriously.

"Of course, I know the entire French press is bought," I explained, "but what the hell is going on here?"

"Don't you have to do any advertising?" he asked, after he had taken me to the corner bar and supplied my troubles with a drink.

"Well, I could put in an ad for models. How much will that cost?" I've forgotten what it cost. Maybe \$15 for quite a large one.

"And now," he said kindly, "you go home and write your story and I will see that it gets in. Send in the ad along with it. But for heaven's sake, get an angle they'll print."

I went home and wrote out an ad for American girls to show clothes, July Fourth. Apply Hotel Plaza Athenée, June 30. Then I wrote up my story. I'm rather proud of my angle, so I'll print it below, just as it appeared, slightly cut to be sure, in the Paris *Herald* the week before the show.

MISS HAWES WILL DISPLAY MODELS OF AMERICAN WOMAN'S TASTE HERE

With a view of showing French dressmakers what American women want in the way of clothes, Miss Elizabeth Hawes, New York dressmaker, will show a number of American designed dresses at the Ambassadeurs on Saturday.

Miss Hawes, who has had thorough experience in designing clothes in Paris, now has her own firm in New York under the name of Hawes and Company, Inc. The dresses which Miss Hawes will show at teatime and later during the dinner are not for

sale in France, and she has no idea of going into competition with the French couturiers.

"I was invited to show a few of my dresses," said Miss Hawes, "and I thought it was an amusing idea at first. On second thought, I realized that the French dressmakers, who are always so anxious to know just how American women do dress in the United States, would be really interested in seeing some American designs. There is no doubt but that the French have more idea of real 'chic' than any other country in the world.

"In America, the women wear mostly adaptations of French styles," she continued, "not real French styles. It is difficult for a French designer to understand the sort of life we American women lead. American women demand a certain kind of afternoon dress, and dresses which they wear at home in the evening, which

never are used in Paris. The difference between French and American style is not very great, but just enough to make many French designs useless for the United States. I do hope that any one in Paris who is interested in designing for American women will come and see the few models which I am showing. The collection includes everything from 'breakfast in bed' to supper in that most American place, a speakeasy.

"The French have a great tradition of many years behind their couture and as they come to understand more thoroughly the American scene, in its ever-changing phases, they will make clothes which are created to be worn in the United States."

Miss Hawes was formerly a designer for Nicole Groult, in Paris. Her New York firm is at 8 West 56th Street.

I placed an order for red-white-and-blue programs of Hawes clothes and went to Geneva. There I spent a week forgetting clothes under the aegis of the League of Nations. I returned to put on my show. I carried with me some letters from newspaper men in Geneva who thought it was all very funny, just as I did while I was in Geneva. They were apprising their colleagues in Paris that here was a news story.

The week preceding my showing aux Ambassadeurs will always stand out in my mind as one of the most harassing of my life. I wrote a letter to Hawes Inc. the days before and after the show which more or less tells all in just the garbled form in which it happened. The letter was preserved in the archives and I reprint it with parenthetical inserts:

Dear and priceless partners . . . I shall begin the story of my life now . . . and after it is over, you may read about it in the papers. I doubt if I shall be alive to tell the tale.

Before I left for Geneva, everything got set in one day, as I think I told you. Willy Morris must just own the place . . . that's what I thought. Ha . . . it is not true at all!

But if an artistic director called Eddie Lewis ever crosses your paths, remember, we owe it all to him. And call up Willy and tell him to raise his salary right away. Not because his ideas are so hot . . . but because I begin to think I owe it to him for keeping the ship on the rails. I may be speaking a bit too soon. This show may never come off tomorrow. I'm glad I have two ads to prove I meant to do it.

Things have gone like this since Monday last (the day I got back to Paris from Geneva) :

Went to the editor of the Paris *Herald* with a letter from an important person in Geneva. Editor was very snotty. I forgot to say that I had already seen Harold Smith and had begun to gather about my naïveté. The Paris press, including the American division, is to be bought.

Well . . . so I went with my letter from pal Vischer of *Polo* to the head of the advertising dept. who immediately took me to drink and lunch . . . and I had to put an ad for models anyway . . . so he said to write what I wanted said and he'd see. The enclosed is the result of that.

(The enclosed was the clipping from the Paris *Herald*.)

Only my having gathered how bad things were saved us from not getting the show on at all. I think that you will agree that while my telephone conversation may be bad, I might get diplomatic one of these days.

Well . . . so I began to get models, each worse than the last.

God . . . if I could have hired a plane, I'd have had you all over here. But anyway, I have eight who are fairly present-

able . . . two divine . . . or maybe three. It took nights and days to find them. I want sympathy.

In the meantime (the week before the show), I distributed my letters and saw people, endlessly. The A.P. has its story already, with pictures. The New York *Herald* is coming . . . not going away over the Fourth, as so many are! . . . and they have two other pictures. The next time we do this, I'll know more. I should have had a flock of them (pictures). I am sending some rough sketches to the *Herald*, also. Luckily they wanted them rough. (This refers to the fact that I have never been a good sketcher.)

I want this idea put across well . . . that the absence of advance publicity is due to two things . . .

1. I didn't want to spend more than a million dollars.

2. Les Ambassadeurs wouldn't have put on the show *at all*.

The boss who said it could be done went away. Perhaps it's just as well. By this time it would be called off if he could hear the mutters . . . but no one has the authority to call it off! So, they (the underlings who ran the nightclub) are shaking in their shoes at every breath they hear for fear the Paris couturiers will send them to hell for this. They pulled a nice one today and said we couldn't have any dressing rooms. Eddie and I will fix that, though. And the girls I have are really sweet. They've rallied around and helped and I really think they'd dress in the street if necessary. We did think of taxis . . . but an open corridor seems better. *God*.

Well, now you see why I squashed the letters from Geneva, such nice letters . . . about making a row and getting famous . . . I'd of been famous but dead.

Maybe I can give a story to the press when I get home. You'd better start asking the ambassador about it. Maybe the French will never settle the debt now. Anyway, my bills will help a lot!

Poor Bud . . . (Bud, Mary Robinson, was my chief assistant and a stockholder) . . . I know how mad you were when you got a cable for all those dollars, but a girl can't start anything she doesn't finish . . . and Shaler can get to be a bigger stockholder, maybe!

I'm full of very bright ideas. Paris has gone completely French and if anyone thinks it's chic here, they're out of their heads. I know it isn't the season (for chic people to be in Paris) . . . but even so. I made an amusing discovery while looking through the social register that all the chic French countesses are American. Those who aren't had American mothers. Tell that to Selma. (Selma Robinson, the press agent.) . . . and tell her I see the future of fashion writing and if she can line up a couple or one smart girl, I'll help her be a big success. If we work a little, we can slit Paris right up the back in a few years. And that will be swell because then I'll never have to show clothes here again.

What else? I haven't slept this week, and I have three new hats from Agnes, each madder than the last. Madame Groult will come, of course. I have May Wilson Preston and Pierre de Lanoux who is the French League of Nations representative for the press . . . and Groult . . . at my table. I must explain that I sent the most polite letters to all the couturiers whom I like! And none of them will come, of course. But I am so amused at their notes. Schiaparelli really would come . . . I know her . . . but she's going away for the weekend. Patou's publicity man was polite, called me twice before he got in touch with Patou . . . and never has spoken since! Madeleine Vionnet sends me the very best wishes for success and regrets that she is making models and can't come . . . of course. But hers was the nicest note. Some of them didn't answer at all. Worth said he'd come but I suppose he won't. Main Bocher who got me my first designing job regrets shortly. They're really busy as hell. (It was just before the summer openings.) I wish I thought they were scared.

I think I must have asked 100 people for tea (personal invitations), so I guess I'll have fifty . . . and I shall just go through them in a daze, I suppose. When I think that I have actually gotten nervous in New York! This is a great training ground. When you said, may God attend (that's what the firm cabled me the day before the show) you didn't half know how much I needed him on my side.

I'm rattling around in the largest apartment in the Hotel

Plaza . . . for the minimum price of smallest room. I have two bedrooms, two baths, but only one salon. I shall doubtless have to pawn all the clothes to get out. I may be home almost as soon as this is! But what has cost the most about the show are the models, mostly . . . tea will be more than I can imagine, ads and printing . . . and tips, dearie, tips. I sometimes think it must be cheaper to live in New York, after all. All prices are marked in plain figures.

I gather Bendelarie hasn't come over yet. I guess she might be pretty mad if I get enough publicity out of this. Listen, I have to come home in the third class, although it did make me sick coming over . . . so if you think it's a very bad idea, cable me and I'll accept a gift from the firm. (I was paying my own traveling expenses out of my salary.)

I encourage myself by thinking about the cost of one ad in the *New Yorker*! I think it would only cost about \$125 for first class . . . and if I hadn't had to stay at the damn fancy hotel . . . but, no. Only the chasseurs (bellboys) have kept me alive. They wish I'd always live here. (I had to tip them so often.) The management finds me a little commercial . . . since they are getting gypped.

About when I land . . . I suppose I can face anything, so I'd better go through with getting stuck in the customs. (The press agent had figured out I could get stuck in the customs with the clothes, the officials thinking they were French. This idea was thrown out although it would have led to plenty of press, me proving my clothes were made in America.)

If you think it isn't worthwhile, be sure to let me know . . . and my father. He has a guy who can get me through, you know. And maybe Johnny McClain (Ship's news reporter) will give me a break in the press when I land. But if he is going to, let me know about whether I should just slip into the first class to meet him and give him a rendezvous in the bar or something. Just figure out what I'm to do when I land . . . and cable or write as the time is. I'll let you know when I'm sailing.

I'm so sick of my favorite Paris at this point, I never want to see it again . . .

Oh, about the movies. Richard de Rochemont is a lamb. (De

Rochemont was Shaler's cousin, head, I think, of the Fox news-reel in Paris. I had a letter for him, needless to state.) But they really want them so he didn't have to pull anything. It rained today so we couldn't take them, but we do it next Tuesday at ten A.M. for France and America. We'll have to get right to work not to have them cut the film when it lands. I'll speak to De Rochemont about whom to see. The French man (in the Fox newsreel) is a riot. He thinks mannequins are only good when they are fancy. I'll probably have to get a whole new set for them. One damn thing after another. I . . . oh well. My luck is phenomenal . . . and we may make a million dollars yet if you'll only turn into sharp business women.

For God's sake don't ever let anyone plan any publicity stunt again which has to be managed solo.

I will finish this letter in my right mind, for better or for worse . . . day after tomorrow.

July Sixth

First off . . . they turned away dozens of people in the afternoon. There wasn't enough food to go around for tea. The place was absolutely packed.

The audience was a great *mélange* of social and press and curious Americans. My models were simply swell. Everything went perfectly. There wasn't a hitch. They called for me at the end. I looked fine.

The girls (models) simply went right through all the fuss about dressing rooms and what not as if the reputation of our great country depended on it. I enclose the one French write-up I was able to get by drag.

(Pierre de Lanoux brought Jean Prevost. I put a translation of his piece below. The reason my name is not mentioned is because he could not do that without the paper being paid.)

L'Ambassade De La Grace

MODES

d'Amerique

Yesterday, in Paris, an American couturière presented her collection for the next season. Although the idea seems daring, no impudence nor even assurance underlined its audacity. The young couturière herself was trembling, and the numbers shook in the hands of the mannequins.

If the styles are a good deal inspired by Europe, and more than one costume bears a French name, the collection has, nevertheless, a distinct personality. There is something in these creations which is almost too intelligent, too wilful. Every intention is easily perceptible.

No bad taste, however! If the transparent negligee for breakfast in bed reminds one a little of the chaste provocations of American movies, a velours motoring coat with very simple lapels has nothing more extreme about it than a very beautiful cut, and gives, one scarcely knows why, the impression of a fifteenth century costume. The chief interest of "Madame Shops" lies in a double-breasted collar of fur, like a fencing pad, on the front of the coat, which by its lively and almost savage charm emphasizes the complete correctness of the whole ensemble.

The Sunday-night dress, one of the most striking, owes all its charm to the parallel stripes which, since the dress is very tightly fitted, accentuate the outline of the hips as do the long shaded strokes in beautiful Italian drawings.

Most of the thought and the few eccentricities used by this young

American couturière have been applied to the backs. Thus, for "dinner, no theatre," an open tuxedo waistcoat effect, faced in shrimp color, has been used for the design of the lowcut back.

Another dress entitled "Debutante," (in anglicized French and alluding to the London Court), has a sort of odd little vest encircling the waist and buttoning in the back, reminding us of the famous waistcoat of the Saint-Simonian period which likewise was buttoned from behind to symbolize the fraternal assistance due to one man from another.

Considering their titles, I expect wonders from the last numbers which are: the "Par dela le bien et le mal" (Beyond Good and Evil) and "Speak-easy" (Clandestine cabaret). The dress, "Coq de roche" (coxcorn) in color, is semi-tailored in front with wide, heavy draping in the back to suggest the wings of the accursed archangel.

There is the America of next Fall, but the America of yesterday and today still dances about us. An American in belted jacket, resembling the renowned Mr. Taft, dances with a stout befeathered lady in the mode of 1900. A Negro tosses himself about with his two clattering rattles to incite the rhythm of a Cuban dance. Magnificent Argentine singers intone with triumphant voice: "Morir quisaz de desesperanza" (To die perhaps of despair).

Here, in the dance as in Fashion, the American style is all antithesis.

JEAN PREVOST

(Back to my letter) :

. . . I had several offers (from French papers) at 1,000 francs per write-up, which I declined. Here is a list of the press whom I know were there: Tell Selma if she gets English (British) clippings to put in an order:

Ruby Baxter . . . *Daily Telegraph*

Christine Diemer . . . *Variety* . . . gets a special story this afternoon.

Mr. Dalmau . . . Havana paper

Elene Foster . . . *Spur, Christian Science Monitor*

Rosette Hargrave . . . N.E.A. took a lot of pictures including one of me, have Selma check up with Blanchard when they come through and try to get a set.

Adelaide Kerr . . . A.P. . . . has a long story and pictures.

Bee Mathieu . . . *New Yorker*

Constance Miller . . . *Ladies Home Journal*

Dora Miller . . . N. Y. *Herald Trib.* has pictures and sketches

Perkins . . . Fairchilds . . . promises to also send cable when I sail

Dorothy Stote . . . *Phil. Pub. Ledger*

Baron Wrangle . . . Hearst . . . very impressed

Meg Villars . . . *Graphic*

. . . Those are the only ones I am sure were there . . . but that gives us two big syndicate stories (A.P. and N.E.A.) and some small write-ups, I suppose. Really it was considered a huge success by everybody. I'm sore as hell their reputations here depend on their keeping in with the French couturiers . . . so I don't suppose they'll cheer about the independence of the American couture too much. A woman just called up to congratulate me . . . whom I used to know. . . . I don't know what's going to happen in New York . . . but in Paris I'm famous, all right.

. . . I wish to heaven you'd all been here . . . not only to help . . . but also to see. I begin to consider myself quite competent to have pulled it off. All credit to you, Miss Eleanor Shaler, for arranging the whole thing, movies included. After all, I haven't my bills yet but I figure the cost of one *New*

Yorker ad is going to cover us nicely . . and that's pretty slick. I wish I could have done it for really nothing . . . but there was tea for so many . . . and eight models . . . so as not to have any hitches.

. . . In the evening there were lots of very grand people. You can read who in *Town and Country* when it comes out. I think it was all very worthwhile . . . except my getting into such a state of weariness, I haven't relaxed yet. I have an idea about next spring . . . we'll begin to send a group of models to the races . . . never done in U.S.A. . . . good couturière kind of publicity. Will make a swell story if we plant it right. (The department stores beat me to that bright thought.)

. . . I can't wait to see what pops in New York . . . but I'll have to. It's worth a good deal to get the stuff into *Town and Country*. I do hope you're both (Bud and Miss Shaler, my two stockholders) satisfied with me. By the time I get home, if you aren't, I'll be able to bear being told. Please be sure to tell Willy Morris about Eddie Lewis . . . and that Noble Sissle, orchestra leader, is one of God's gentlemen. He is dark in color and says he'll send his wife to us to dress. Just three Americans helping one another . . . Lewis, Sissle, and me. Lovely group we made. (Every time something went wrong, no dressing rooms, no rehearsal, the two gentlemen would take me firmly by the arm, sit me at a table and say "We're Americans. We'll see you through!") . . . Madame Groult came . . . compliments. Molyneux's publicity gal was stupefied with the swellness of it all.

. . . Of course none of the couturiers came, but I have their lovely batch of letters . . . Maybe Selma can have a bright idea about what to do with them.

Another thing is . . . tell Selma to make a list of any stories she wants me to write . . . and try hard if I'm going to have to do radio or anything public to make it for September, for I must have a little peace to do the collection. The blue dress is lousy . . . bad color . . . I did not show it.

The pink and brown is divine . . . as is the black striped chiffon . . . my congratulations, Bud. (She designed that one.) The corduroy things are swell, I think. Plum suit, fair. I could

have done something to it in the process if I'd been there. Anyway . . . I like the one thing the *Herald* said about the clothes, that they are simple. And I like the *Intransigeant* saying good taste . . . classic . . . and, by the way, I was certainly not trembling as per Mon. Prevost. I was only in a slight rage because they mixed everything about my tables and guests all up, of course.

I think some New York paper should be amused to print a translation of the *Intran* story . . . run July 5 . . . and not bought. Since I started writing this, I have seen some pictures of the show and one will be printed in *Paris Midi*.

. . . Wearily yours . . . but they say it was a success so who cares,

LISA

I was undoubtedly trembling with something more than rage on the historic afternoon, July fourth, 1931. The girls ultimately dressed on a balcony which overlooked the main floor and on which eight spot-light men were working.

This means more if you realize that the French mannequin is usually a kept lady and gets no great respect from anyone. My models were all nice young American girls who showed the clothes out of the goodness of their hearts.

One of the things I knew before the show started was that the models were going to have to endure having their tails pinched by every passing waiter and a good deal of lighthearted if quite vulgar banter from the lighting men. I fully expected some model to let out a piercing scream and flee before she ever appeared on the floor.

I also knew the management just hadn't been able to find time for a rehearsal. Before the show began, I looked down the long, long polished dance floor. The tables ten deep on the sides, were crowded with people, chattering, amused. I was not amused.

Away at the end of that long floor all I saw were eight or

ten very shallow, steep, polished steps, leading up to the platform where the Noble Sissle and his orchestra played. Down those steps my valiant models had to walk, slowly, gracefully—and unrehearsed.

Slowly, finally, they came. Noble Sissle was doing his promised part, timing his music to their un-rehearsed rhythm. Down came my innocent brown corduroy suit with its turtle-necked angora pull-over. Along came "Madame Shops," the plum suit to which I would have added something if I had been home when it was made.

"Lydia Pinkham," the breakfast in bed number, a red flannel jacket with batiste ruffled panties glossed over by its batiste ruffled petticoat, gave the audience a good hearty laugh. I felt better.

The clothes were on the whole too simple, too undramatic, to be shown in a nightclub. There were a few boos and hisses from time to time, answered by cheers from the patriotic visiting American.

I had no sable trimmed wraps for the models to drag behind them, no glittering lamé to glaze the public's eyes. There was "Picasso," my first dress in three colors, red, white and blue, slim, straight, and anatomical. Nobody noticed it much, I think. It was one of my best-selling evening dresses for the next three years in New York.

Jean Prevost saw "Liebestraum," the Sunday night dress, with its parallel stripes of double and single chiffon clinging to the hips of the model. "One of the most outstanding," he thought, and so did Hawes customers for another two years.

The last model made her last unrehearsed turn in the last and twentieth dress. It all took about twenty minutes. The audience clapped, nicely, warmly. I took my bow. I

said, "Thank you. It's nice you could come. Thank you, it was fun. Thank you, yes, we're doing it again tonight."

Again tonight, to a smaller and more select audience of gala-clad nightclubbers. More sophisticated, they were, less amused and more polite. Thank you and thank you and good-night. . . "I don't know what's going to happen in New York—but in Paris I'm famous, all right."

The morning after, I was less happy. "Nobody really saw the clothes," I thought. "I didn't really get much press," I sighed. In my efforts to bide by the instincts of self-preservation, I had not gone out of my way for news reporters. Anyway, I wasn't trying to create an international scandal.

Had I done right, had I done wrong, had I done nothing? I slept for twenty-four hours.

The movies capped the climax. De Rochemont wanted to take them out of Paris the following Tuesday because he couldn't get any sound but auto horns in town on the edge of the Champs Elysées. Some of the models had had enough and refused to take any further part. I collected a few new ones, including a red-headed French girl who'd been brought to the show by the father of a friend.

We went out to the suburbs of Paris to a garden and spent hours and hours having the models make sounds. Most of the hours were spent teaching the red-haired girl from Marseilles to say "I yam frm Bwokleen."

When it was all over and they'd run out of film I asked De Rochemont if I could see it run off before I left Paris. He looked a little embarrassed.

"Oh, we aren't going to release it in France after all," he said. "We'll just send it over to America to be developed."

My first wave of anti-French feeling came over me. I got rheumatism in the back of my neck and a bad attack of hay fever. I hardly dared go home because I'd been expected to

do the whole show for nothing and it cost me all of \$300. I could cry when I think of that now. But it gives an excellent idea of the shoe string upon which one American designer rose to fame.

Just at that moment, I was more concerned with what a bad job I felt I'd done than anything else. I was sure Selma Robinson, my press agent, and Shaler were sitting in New York agreeing that another *New Yorker* ad would have been worth six trips like this one to Paris. Fatigue had reduced me to a point beyond rationality.

I returned to New York on the *Berengaria* and Selma got on at Quarantine with the ships' news reporters. She was very brisk and pally with them. I was escorted to the top deck to have my picture taken. Then we invited the reporters to come to my cabin for a drink. Bringing whiskey for reporters during prohibition was routine and didn't escape even a novice like me.

On the way down to the cabin Selma asked me why I hadn't gotten more press. At that moment I would have been happy to throw her over-board.

"I got an A.P. story and one from N.E.A., and *Variety*, and some odd bits," I said, "and *Town and Country*."

"I haven't seen any of them," she muttered darkly, "but anyway, there was a note in Walter Winchell's column yesterday saying 'Ships' news reporters look out for Elizabeth Hawes'."

And they swept into my cabin to look out for me. They said, "So what is it all about?" I said, "I showed my own American-designed clothes in Paris." They said, "Come on. There's more to it than that." I kept on saying wasn't that enough. After all I'd never done anything so difficult in my life. If I'd been French and come to America to undermine the U. S. Steel, I couldn't have had a colder reception. They

drank a lot of Scotch and relaxed and insinuated that I had married the Prince of Wales and was just holding out on them.

Anyway they all had pictures and gave their own short versions of my story, very short versions, but the pictures with their captions, from the conservative *New York Times* with its "Shows U. S. Gowns in Paris" through the *Daily News* with something about "Reverse English" down to Mr. Hearst's "She's Barred From France," the pictures went out over the wires and there I was—on the map.

In spite of not being news to the *Paris Herald*, in spite of so many fashion writers in Paris being hired strictly to report French clothes, in spite of that horrible week of rushing from place to place and trying to do it all single-handed, the United States had been apprised of the fact that an American girl named Hawes had shown American Designs in Paris. They had been apprised because of press-agentry, of course. The ships' news reporters put me on the map.



UNFORTUNATELY it was I, and not my clothes, that went onto the map in July, 1931. What was worse, I became inordinately fond of myself after my picture came out in all those papers.

My nervousness in regard to press agents dates from that

time. Although I have since learned a great deal more about the ways and means and results of publicity, advertising, and promotions of people and things in general, press agents still give me the jitters. It is because they keep you concentrating on yourself to such an extent that pretty soon you believe the whole legend they're building up.

Luckily, in September, after the Paris showing and resultant fame, I had a good case of hysterics the night after I showed my new fall clothes and regained my perspective. I used to burst into tears regularly twice a year on the completion of each collection, because when I showed it, everyone would say, "It's the best collection you've ever made."

I always knew some of it was good and some bad and always it seemed as if no one would be bothered to criticize it from any fundamental point of view. Ultimately I realized that the "art" of designing clothes in America is too commercial to have its theoretical critics. The American designer of clothes, or the store which sells clothes, has recourse to publicity or advertising as the means of notifying the public about what goes on.

Everyone in America is fairly clear about the meaning of the word advertising. For a certain amount of money I, or anyone who has a product for sale, buys space in a newspaper or periodical which is presumably read by people who want what I sell. In this space I, the advertiser, theoretically have the privilege of printing any pictures or words I like concerning my product.

The newspaper or magazine retains the right to refuse any ad which it considers false. It also retains the right to try and argue the advertiser out of printing news which is going to make a liar out of some other advertiser.

As far as fashion advertising goes, it is no worse than any other advertising as regards the copy used to describe

the clothes shown. To say that over-exaggeration, hyperbole, is the general rule in advertising copy, would be to put it mildly. In general the public knows that the super-glamorous, hyper-chic, uncontrollably lush words are the bunk.

But where the illustrations are concerned, fashion ads have a big chance to draw ten yards of material into a skirt where only three exist in reality, or to double the width of a fur collar. The only net result is that when the lady comes in to buy the coat as shown in the ad, she sees that the illustration was made through rose-colored glasses. She can always refuse to buy and has only lost some, perhaps, valuable time.

So, to go into the matter of fashion advertising would only be to question the entire advertising business, and sooner or later the American public will undoubtedly get surfeited with it and rebel. I want to talk about the specific matter of fashion publicity. Publicity is editorial mention in the pages of a newspaper or magazine for which one does not pay directly or does not pay at all.

Publicity for which one does not pay at all must be based on the subject having a real news value. The editors of the paper or magazine, being entirely convinced that the public wants to know certain facts, print the facts.

The longer I live, the more I realize that there is comparatively little real news in the world of style and fashion. What holds true for the Paris fashion reporter holds equally true for the New York fashion reporter. Filling a daily column with straight fashion news is one long fight. The newspaper fashion reporter should be allowed to write about anything but clothes two-thirds of the time.

The editors of most newspapers feel that, since they have such a large amount of daily advertising concerning fashion, they must run daily fashion columns. If those columns mention names of specific designers or stores, an enormous ri-

valry begins between various advertisers. If Lord and Taylor and R. H. Macy take an equal number of advertising lines per week, both stores feel they can demand an equal amount of editorial mention.

In order to cope with this, the fashion writer would have to make mathematical calculations weekly, dividing her space in direct relation to the advertisers in her paper. Obviously Lord and Taylor and R. H. Macy do not necessarily furnish equal amounts of fashion news per week or per month. The fashion writer must be allowed some freedom in writing her column.

The New York newspapers developed a uniform policy of mentioning no American names at all in their fashion columns. They often use a little box advising the public to write in and ask where the articles or garments mentioned can be bought. Sometimes they simply write up certain clothes or print pictures of them as general news without any possible identification of the source. The paper protects itself in this manner from the competitive jealousies of its advertisers and at the same time allows the fashion writer to talk about non-advertisers.

In 1929, when I began to design in New York, practically all the papers with the exception of the Hearst publications pursued the above policy rigidly. It was literally impossible for the majority of fashion writers here to mention my name even if they liked Hawes clothes.

The fact that I designed everything I sold did not solve the matter. There were few if any designers with their own shops and mentioning them by name was considered free advertising. The names of all the French designers were always mentioned. Although their clothes were sold in most stores here, the French designer did not officially qualify as a potential advertiser.

The policy of not naming designers who work in New York has been slowly cracking up in the past decade. By 1937 all New York newspapers with the exceptions of the *New York Times* and the *Herald Tribune* had given in to some extent. The *World-Telegram*, for instance, would not, in 1937, print the name of a designer below a sketch or photograph but the fashion columnist could name names in her adjoining column.

The case of the *New York Times* is more irritating. Their editorial policy remains publicly adamant on the subject, yet split wide open on one very special occasion connected with Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. The *Times* rotogravure section blazed forth one Sunday with a full length picture of the lady in a dress credited to Sally Milgrim. I guess it was Mrs. Roosevelt's inaugural ball gown or something of equally historic importance. The Milgrim credit line was no less enraging to those of us who had remained unheralded for several years, while dressing other ladies of equal importance.

The *Times* rotogravure section, like many other New York rotogravures, prints pages devoted to photographs of the new French designs each season. The creations of Molyneux, Lelong, Patou, Lanvin, et al., are proudly shown to the public with the names of the individual designers attached.

Another week, along comes the rotogravure section with a banner headline: American designed clothes. There are pages of dresses, coats, and suits. The fabrics are described, the colors and lines are written up. "Our own American designs" . . . by whom? Why, by Americans. Who are they? What are their names? Never mind that, these are "Clothes designed in America" whoopee—by perfectly nameless people, robots maybe.

Syndicate fashion writers for out of town papers can

use names and do. A great many people in the hinterland, where no Hawes designs existed, knew I designed in New York before the local residents were apprised of the fact.

The plight of Elizabeth Hawes in trying to gain recognition as a designer from 1929 to the present day is the plight of all designers in America, and particularly in New York. Hollywood has built up its designers along with the rest of the stars. Chicago produced a fashion show of Chicago designed and manufactured clothes in the summer of 1937. Thousands of people went to see it. In New York, in the fall of 1937, one of the most important groups of women in fashion work found that, while they were ready and willing to put on a show of American designed clothes, the New York clothing manufacturers were not yet in a humor to co-operate.

The fashion magazines are a powerful potential source of publicity for the designer in America. Perhaps you remember I mentioned, proudly, the presence of representatives of the largest fashion magazines at my first opening. They were not only there, but they subsequently printed sketches of my clothes. What is more, they still do from time to time. I am very grateful to the editorial departments for this—because I am not, at the moment, an advertiser.

The life of the ladies who work on the editorial boards of fashion magazines is in my estimation a most unpleasant one. They would prefer to fill up the magazine with things which they want to show the public because they think the dresses are pretty or chic or smart or whatever it is they like. Although they are ostensibly hired to do just this, they are seldom allowed to.

The editorial board of any fashion magazine is just a necessary evil to the business manager. If advertisers were bright enough to make ads which the public really wanted

to read, if Celanese would only print attractive little stories and bright quips on the pages for which it pays, then a fashion magazine could be published which was all ads. Then the business manager wouldn't forever have to remind the editorial board that if they don't do something about Lady-Dee corsets, we will lose the advertising.

As it is, Lady-Dee corsets takes a certain number of pages a year, for which they pay some \$1,500 each, for the purpose of telling the world about what divine corsets they make. At the same time, Lady-Dee corsets expects the editorial department to tell the world what divine corsets they make and do a much better job of it than any advertising agency on earth.

It is not that the editorial department can't come through. It is that, sometimes, they don't just happen to think that Lady-Dee corsets are wonderful. They ignore Lady-Dee corsets, willfully. The advertising manager comes in. He bangs his fist on the table. He gets results. A photograph of a girl in Lady-Dee corsets and cellophane comes out in the editorial pages. The account is saved.

Into the space where went the photograph of the girl in a corset there had been going, perhaps, a photograph of a girl in a dress designed and made by someone who does not advertise in the magazine. Maybe that photograph gets in next month. Maybe it never gets in.

Pity the poor editorial department. They are driven to a point where they go first for everything to the advertisers of the magazine. There are plenty of them. The editors find more or less what they approve of from the advertisers.

Or, believe it or not, if there just isn't anything, they send bright young girls down to tell the advertisers what to make so it can be put into the magazine without blushing. This, I would say, is fair. The magazines make their money

and pay their salaries through the advertiser. They should help him out.

The thing of it is, what the public sees in the pages of any fashion magazine is not always what is selected for the good of the public but often what is selected for the good of the advertising department.

The magazine is naturally in business to make money. The biggest advertisers are not necessarily the ones with the best merchandise. A sort of compromise is effected between the advertising department and the editorial board of any fashion magazine. In return for every ten editorial pages allotted to the wares of advertisers, a half a page is allowed to the wares of non-advertisers.

There have been magazines which decided that a good snappy editorial department brought a certain kind of reader and the readers brought the advertisers. Therefore the editorial department must not be influenced by the advertising department. I have never known of a straight fashion magazine that was run in this way. I believe it could be done.

It seems to me the experience of the *New Yorker* proves it. The *New Yorker* is not a fashion magazine, heaven knows and thank goodness. It, nevertheless, sells a fair amount of space to fashion advertisers who want to have its readers know about them. It is the policy of the *New Yorker* that the editorial department and the advertising department must not speak to one another. Lois Long writes as she pleases and goes to see what she feels like in the fashion mart.

Sometimes I advertise in the *New Yorker*, sometimes I don't. L. L. usually gets around to see my clothes twice a year. Sometimes she likes them, sometimes she doesn't. That is her business and she reserves the right to say what she thinks. Whether or not I'm advertising, is of no importance.

I was going to say, probably she doesn't even know.

Maybe she doesn't. But the *New Yorker* editorial board did once know that I was advertising. In an access of self-righteousness or something, they told someone who handed in a profile about me that they couldn't print it *because* I was an advertiser! I immediately gave up advertising but they didn't print one anyway.

The *New Yorker* isn't the only magazine which separates its editorial from its advertising. The big women's magazines can do it easily where fashion is concerned because they do not carry any local dress advertising. The *Playbill*, the New York theatre program, allows its fashion girl to go her own sweet way—with occasional proddings, I gather.

There is seldom a young designer with enough money to buy advertising space in the large fashion magazines. The designer therefore is deprived of a wide public hearing from that source.

The young designer can not get a great deal of notice in the newspaper fashion columns. What is a young girl to do?

She can hire a press agent who deals with the matter as best she may. The press agent deals with the commodity of style or fashion which is seldom news. The press agent must turn the designer herself into news. Here the feature story writers and the straight news reporters come in.

A feature story writer is not interested in talking about the basic stylish features of the work of a clothes designer. Feature stories deal with intimate glimpses into one's private life or the more amusing angles of one's work.

The world is apprised of the fact that Elizabeth Hawes goes off alone on freight boats, that she has Afghan hounds, that she likes to ride a bicycle in France, that she has made a jacket of mattress ticking or a skirt of shaved lamb. The world begins to think, quite rightly, that if Elizabeth Hawes

is representative of American Designers, those designers probably have amusing lives but are a little mad.

The press agent of Elizabeth Hawes wants to promote Hawes clothes. She is unable to do much on that idea. She resorts to any sort of idea which will, as a last resort, get the name Hawes into print.

I received a good deal of press on the Paris showing. None of it mentioned whether the clothes I showed were good or bad. I was a big brave girl who'd taken coals to Newcastle. I had bearded the lions in their dens.

My press agent got nervous, a couple of months after the clippings of my Paris exploits stopped coming in. She said, "The rotogravure sections have a bad time getting photographs which are timely at Thanksgiving. If you will let me have your picture taken with a pumpkin, I am sure I can get it in."

I said, "I am very busy. Why don't you have my picture taken later with a holly wreath and get it in for Christmas?"

She said, "You are just beginning to get the idea."

I didn't have my picture taken with a pumpkin—or with a holly wreath. But I had gotten the idea.

I realized that building up a name as a designer in America was a ticklish job. It was going to have to be accomplished without benefit of much advertising. I also decided I had better get along as best I could without a press agent. I was afraid maybe I'd be broken down and find myself giving an Easter speech dressed in an egg.

The whole story of the Paris showing and press-agentry gave me a healthy horror of press stunts. To me, showing the clothes in Paris was not basically a press stunt. I had a good sound fundamental desire to make the world know that clothes were not designed only in France. I had then, as I still have, a big urge to see everyone, male and female, beau-

tifully and functionally dressed. I believed then, as I still do, that if the hooey of Paris fashion could be scraped off, designers would be left to function quietly all over the world, working satisfactorily for their small groups of customers.

The fact that showing the clothes in Paris didn't turn on me and rend me limb from limb was partially a lucky accident. Because I didn't have enough power or money to make it into a world-beating international press story, the whole universe wasn't given an opportunity to laugh very hard at me and at all American designing.

American designing was still in its infancy. My show in Paris was, in a sense, a childish gesture of defiance. As I learned in the next two years, nobody was going to be able to kill designing here, but over-promoting before it was ready would set it back.

Since the Paris showing, I've never tried to pull off any press stunt. I've done a few small things which have hit the national news like showing clothes in Russia. I have never tried to give out any stories about myself or my clothes unless I was convinced that they were fit to print.

All in all, the publicity path for the budding designer is not an easy one to follow, and I don't fully believe in the survival of the fittest where designers in America are concerned. All dress designers do not have friends to help them, as I have had, in making a name for myself. And many designers would be unable to adjust to becoming a news item. After all, we are supposedly merely designers, who want to ply our trade. It's quite a good deal to expect us to be press agent and business manager as well, and all of this without enough money to have the benefit of the advertising department's O.K.

I think this more concretely now than I did in 1931. Since then I've seen some quite good designers come and go

because they couldn't scream loud enough to attract attention, and had no money to pay someone else to do it for them.

Since 1931, when the ships' news reporters put me on the map, I've become quite convinced that the public wants and the manufacturers need America's future designers. I've built up my own business which is an insignificant bit of the proof. The more important part of the story lies in the field of mass production.



MY INTRODUCTION to mass production came about in that rather devious and underhanded way which runs straight through the story of fashion. It was Mary Lewis, the vice-president of Best and Co., who convinced me, for better or for worse, that I should learn about clothes in the raw white light of city streets.

This is what happened: My chief assistant, Mary Robinson, designed a few things for Hawes Inc. along with her other functions of stockholder, model, saleslady. She, in the fall of 1931, designed a small leather jacket which buttoned on either side of the neck a la bellboy.

This jacket, being of leather, was difficult to sew in our workroom so I found a leather coat manufacturer to make it for us. I explained to him that I wouldn't sell many but that if he would make those few, he could have the design to sell out of New York. It has always been my proud boast that what you bought at Hawes Inc. can be bought nowhere else in New York and, usually, nowhere else in the world.

The manufacturer came up to the shop to get the jacket and assured me that he didn't want the design to sell himself at all. He was just a good fellow helping me out. As he left, I nevertheless called after him, "And if you do sell the jacket in New York, I will sue you!"

We all laughed pleasantly and began to sell the jacket for \$65. I paid him \$15 to make it, me supplying the leather. It cost us about \$20 so we were getting a 66% mark-up which is average in specialty shops, although was somewhat higher than I had to take on most of the clothes at that time. I will go into the matter of pricing expensive clothes later.

Life was going along calmly and pleasantly when, one Monday morning, my telephone began to ring and rang all day. Everybody was calling up to tell me that my jacket had been advertised by Best and Co. as "Schiaparelli's Little Mess Jacket." It was shortly after my fall opening in September 1931, and all the fashion girls had seen the jacket in my shop.

I remained philosophical. I said, "It is the first time it has happened but it won't be the last. Why worry?" Then I got a copy of the ad and slowly my anger began to rise.

Schiaparelli's little mess jacket, indeed! It was *my* mess jacket. It was, of course, Mary Robinson's mess jacket, but when you're the top, everything automatically becomes yours no matter how unfair it is.

I rang up Mary Lewis, the vice-president of Best and Co. She had evidently been apprised of the facts of the case. She got into her hat and coat and came right up. She fixed me by being nice about it and I believed her when she said she had had no idea it wasn't a Schiaparelli. Probably she didn't, but possibly Best were liable just the same.

However, she said, "I'll advertise it as yours at once." I said, "Oh, no, don't do that. I've never been advertised by anyone except myself for myself."

"Ford makes all his money on Fords, not Lincolns," said Mary Lewis.

"I'll call you up," I said, and after a couple of days, I did call her up and said okay.

I then went to see the manufacturer who'd copied my jacket for me and for Best and Co. "Miss Hawes," he said, very seriously, "I never even do any business with Best. I couldn't have sold them the jacket."

I looked hopelessly around at the walls, thick with ads of leather coats, ads from Best and Co. "What are these?" I asked.

"Oh, just from years ago," he said firmly.

We went on like that for about twenty minutes. Finally I arose to my feet and displayed temperament, a thing I very rarely do. "This is the most disgusting business in the world," I declaimed as I paced the floor. "I wish I had never been born if I have to be associated with anything so filthy. It is a mass of lies and thievery. Not even a nice young girl like myself can escape. I'm ashamed to think that I'm associated with the making of clothes. I wish I were dead." I took

out my handkerchief and blew my nose. I felt tears coming to my eyes. The manufacturer looked at me, very worried, very pale, he became. I let out a small sob and all the sorrows of his race overcame him.

"Miss Hawes," he said, "I cannot tell a lie. I sold the jacket to Best and Co."

"Thanks," I said, whipping away my handkerchief and making for the elevator.

"What are you going to do?" He followed me out the door.

"I don't know. Sue you probably."

"*Ooh!*" he gasped. "You wouldn't be so mean!"

My lawyer said I had no case so I just tore up the \$75 bill for the jackets the man had made for me and waited. In the meantime, I refunded the difference between our selling price of \$65 and Best's of \$29.50 to the customers who had bought the jacket from us. Our leather was better, but otherwise the jacket was the same. Mass production and selling makes quite a difference in price. Best probably paid him \$15 including leather and took a 50% mark-up.

God was on my side as usual. I was served with a summons by the manufacturer for the price of five jackets he'd delivered. He did it upon getting quite a hot letter from me after his third bill. I said that if he kept on sending bills, I'd sue him. Obviously he didn't believe me. Nobody goes to court for \$75.

We did. I filed a counter claim of \$1,000 for damages on the grounds that the entire outfit, of which the jacket was a part, had been ruined, that I could no longer sell it since Best was selling the jacket. They had called the suit in the municipal court and my lawyer didn't ask for a jury.

We had one glorious day in court. They swore that they had never seen me before, first, and secondly that it was a

Schiaparelli design in any case. Just then, fortunately, came recess for lunch.

I leapt out and got Schiaparelli's representative in America to come and swear that Madame Schiaparelli had not designed the jacket. The judge said he gathered it was just as if someone had stolen the coat of his suit, only leaving him the vest and trousers. He awarded me \$150 damages which I turned over to the lawyer and so broke even.

Mary Lewis told me afterward the courts were prejudiced in favor of the designer in such cases. Maybe it's only justice. At any rate, I've never had the faintest fear of being copied from that day to this. I always know there is some way to get the person who does it, even if I have to be sued myself to accomplish it. (Anyway, I can always design another jacket.)

The more important upshot was Miss Lewis' remark, boring into my brain "*Ford makes all his money on Fords, not Lincolns.*" I was barely making enough money on my Lincolns to keep us all getting our small salaries every week.

I was not particularly distraught about this, but the depression was getting worse. Those weeks were beginning when I hadn't enough money ahead on Monday to pay the next Friday payroll.

Almost immediately up popped Lord and Taylor with an idea. They wanted to promote American Designers! They'd been mulling over the thought for two years. Now, they said, is the time. Who, they were then forced to ask themselves, are the designers?

For the next few years, there was a game which you could start in any group of fashion people. You just said, "Who are the American Designers?" Then you watched everyone scurry around looking in corners to try and find them. Lord and Taylor found some and set about to "promote" them.

Promotion is one of those bright thoughts which Fashion uses to its full extent. To promote something in the department store world of fashion is to first decide to spend a certain amount of money in advertising and buying merchandise. What the merchandise is, doesn't matter much. The idea is to make a big public stir which will fill your store up with people. They may not buy the thing you have chosen to promote, but if they get into the store, they are likely to buy something else.

The best trick is to promote something which the public will, fortuitously, actually want. That way, you won't lose too much money getting them to spend what they have. A promotion is the department store version of a press stunt. If it is a good stunt, it makes the news columns and shows a profit. Otherwise, you have to give out all the news yourself in paid ads and you may lose money.

Promoting American Designers was a press stunt for Lord and Taylor. There was a depression. They needed business. What to do? *American Designers*.

Since I lost absolutely nothing by being promoted in the first batch of American Designers, but actually gained in the long run, I consider myself quite unprejudiced. Lest everyone think that I am just ascribing commercial motives to what was a generous gesture on the part of Lord and Taylor, I quote from the *World-Telegram* of April 13, 1932:

STYLE DISPLAY

100% AMERICAN

The first complete showing of American fashions created by Elizabeth Hawes, Annette Simpson and Edith Reuss, three American designers, who have stepped into the first rank of international styling, was held today at Lord and Taylor's before an

audience of professional critics who afterward were luncheon guests of Miss Dorothy Shaver, vice-president and Director of the store's style Bureau.

The dominant note of the display was the "Americanism" of the design-

ing, a trend which merchandise executives said would be a *new means of stimulating business in the dress industry* (author's italics).

"We still doff our hats to Paris," Miss Shaver said at the luncheon. "Paris gave us our inspiration, and still does. But we believe that there

must be clothes which are intrinsically American, and that only the American designer can create them. That is why we turn today to commend the spirit and the enterprise of these young New York women who are working so successfully to create an American style."

We had come a long way since 1927 when I wanted to design clothes for Lord and Taylor in Paris. There was no necessity for their falling for that idea. The public was going for everything. Everything was French and it sold.

Now, in the spring of 1932, there was a depression. Buying French models was expensive. Moreover, they were sold by Klein for \$4.75. Besides that, the French weren't paying their debts and the British were "Buying British." The public was holding onto its nickels. It needed something startling to pry them loose.

Lord and Taylor bought six models from me which I designed specially for them at \$200 each. When they first asked me, I was in great doubt what to do. Mary Lewis said she thought I should go ahead and ask all the traffic would bear. \$200 seemed to be all the traffic would bear. I hesitated a long time because I was afraid I would alienate my own clients by making cheap clothes.

Finally I went in all the way. I was somewhat horrified at finding I had to attend the luncheon with Annette Simpson and Miss Reuss and present my own clothes to the assembled multitude. I never got through anything like that without gritting my teeth and muttering for God for country and for Yale over to myself.

The luncheon was very grand. All the top fashion people were there. The only harm the whole thing did me was that a very high fashion lady told someone I had no business get-

ting up and making speeches because I wasn't anybody anyway.

I shrugged that off and made a second set of models for Lord and Taylor. They promoted another set of American designers, Clare Potter and Muriel King.

The promotions were widely publicized as well as advertised. A flood of articles on American Designers came out in newspapers and magazines all over the U. S. A. I came in for my share, especially since my name, due to the Paris showing, was already known somewhat.

My publicity never brought many individual customers to Hawes Inc. The great majority of the customers have come one from another, except for those I got from the early *New Yorker* ads. But all of the press I have received, and particularly the Lord and Taylor promotion, has been exceedingly useful in bringing manufacturers to my door.

Usually I think these manufacturers have had very little idea of my capabilities. Often I have failed at the jobs I've undertaken for them. They assumed naively that, since I received a quantity of publicity, I must understand their business and be good at it. Where they wanted to hire my name for its press value and didn't really want me to do anything, I generally succeeded.

I am none the less greatly indebted to the press. I think I should not have survived the depression without the outside jobs that my clippings brought me. The very first of these jobs entered my life in disguise.

Early in 1932 there appeared in my office a dark-haired young woman with a vivacious face who insisted on talking to me. In the old days, on one floor in Fifty-sixth Street, almost anybody who had an urge could lay hand on me. There was one small office off the showroom through which one had

to pass to get to the elevator. I had not graduated to the secretary stage.

I was constantly harassed with insurance salesmen, hand-woven fabric ladies, people who wanted to sell me real estate or corsets, or who wanted me to sell them clothes. I used to hide in the office to the best of my ability until the sales force of one found out what any unknown person wanted.

The brunette in question, as I heard through the door, would not state her business. She would see Miss Hawes. I emerged and learned that her husband had a wholesale bag business. She'd been reading about me in the papers and thought I might design some bags.

I allowed as how I guessed I could if anyone wanted them. I think I can design anything except engines. She went away saying she'd be back with her husband. Surprisingly enough, they arrived a day or so later.

The gentleman, who might have been called Mr. Smith, talked a little about his business. He said that the Smith Co. made good and expensive bags. They had been going once a year to Paris for a long time and buying models. They were growing sick of Paris as a source. The bags were good but all their competitors had the same models.

Since the Smith Co. made expensive bags, they were in a bad spot. Other bag manufacturers made copies of the French models cheaper than they know how. Anyway, he assured me, Smith Co. was an old firm and they had always made fine merchandise. They didn't want to make cheap things.

The firm had originally been his father's business and made very fine luggage. The depression was knocking the bottom out of the expensive luggage business. The Smith Co. had begun to make bags as a side line at first. Now they were

immersed in the bag business, not paying much attention to the luggage.

I nodded sympathetically to all he said. I explained that the guts of my business was the fact that I did my own designing and had no truck with French models.

Hesitatingly he stated his mission. He and his brother wondered whether they would dare give up buying French models and have their own designs. I could tell from his tone that Smith and Brother Smith had argued long about this grave decision. They hadn't yet really reached a conclusion.

Mrs. Smith picked the right girl to convince them when she came in to me. I launched into one of my speeches about designing in America, how it was all nonsense that it couldn't be done; how it was obviously not profitable, as he had proven, to use French designs in expensive merchandise; how there must be dozens of people who could design bags in America; how, of course, I could do it if they wanted me to.

So Brother Smith was brought to talk to me. He was something of a designer himself, younger than Plain Smith, less businesslike, more emotional. Plain Smith had told me that Brother Smith was the one who went to Paris every year for models. I gathered the trip was a pleasure to him. When I saw him, I realized it was a pleasure because he liked getting away from the bag business, not because he liked buying for it.

The business, I gathered, was not so hot. They thought it might possibly be connected with using only French designs. I didn't know anything about the bag business, but it seemed rather obvious to me that if all the bag manufacturers were busy selling the same bags, they couldn't any of them be operating at much of a profit.

We had a good many conferences, Plain and Brother

Smith talking and arguing, with me as mediator. After enough thought to have reconstructed eight or ten bag businesses, they finally drew a long breath and decided to risk everything on some American designed bags.

I was elected to do them a "line." In the wholesale business, any collection of anything shown at one time is known as a "line." At the beginning of every season, you "get out the new line." You are always in a panic because the French make their lines to show in August and you, in America, have to get busy in June.

However brave any wholesaler may look when he hires me or anybody else to do a line in America, he trembles in his boots half the day for fear we won't do what the French are about to do. He trembles because almost all the later fashion reports will be based entirely on what the French have put out. If he hasn't done more or less the same thing, the reporters will just think he doesn't know his business. The buyer will not recognize the designs in his line and they may not dare buy them.

I set about doing a bag line with the help of an apprentice, Dorothy Zabriskie. She turned out to be so good, I hired her afterward. The Smith Co. did their very best to get our ideas from sketches. Finally we resorted to muslin patterns which was somewhat more satisfactory.

By the time we had explained all to Brother Smith, who took care of the designing end, and he had re-explained it to the man who actually made the sample, a good deal of the original thought was gone. After a couple of months, we were finally allowed to talk to the sample-maker ourselves. Originally the Smith Co. said we'd only upset him.

We didn't upset him. He upset us. He was a perfectly competent craftsman who knew how to make bags. We did not know how to make bags. Therefore he despised us. He

was perfectly right. No one should dare to design anything he can't make himself.

The craftsmen in the wholesale businesses in America have acquired a complete disrespect for a certain kind of people who call themselves designers and are only sketchers.

"Why the devil should this woman come in here and try to tell me what to do?" they mutter darkly as they bend over their tools, and you try to tell them that you want a fold—*fold*—in the bottom of the bag.

You don't know how to put the fold in the bottom of the bag. Some instinct just says to you that it can be done. They wish you to hell and decide that you are wrong. They have never seen a bag with a fold in the bottom. They look up rather cutely and say, "I'm sorry, but you see, you just can't put a fold in the bottom of a bag. The leather won't go that way."

After three hours, you go away beaten. If you care enough, you get some leather and fold it just to prove you're right, but there's no use showing it to the bagmaker.

Suddenly, three weeks later, you find a new bag on his table. It has the most fabulously horrible gilt top ever invented. The leather is fake sharkskin. In the bottom, there is a fold. If you are wise, you say nothing. A few weeks after, you find the bag again, in the showroom. You take it in to the bag-maker. You say, "This is a wonderful bottom to this bag. How did you ever think of such a thing?" You carefully omit the word fold. He carefully omits the word fold. You get your bag, when he gets around to it, some eight weeks after you had the original idea.

He is right. You are wrong. You have no business telling him how to make a bag. You don't know yourself. You are no designer at all but just a bastard stylist.

In any case, you do know a few things which could help

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the firm. They can't seem to find anyone else who knows any more. And so, you persist doggedly. We got some fairly good bags made by and for the Smith Co. for the first year. We spent seventy-five percent of our time telling them to make soft bags. *Soft*—not stiff like cardboard, see? soft—soft—SOFT.

The Smith Co. business took a spurt under the Hawes aegis. The bags were promoted, widely advertised by the stores that bought them because they had a story to tell: "*Hawes* bags—that bright young American designer."

I was at first scarcely aware of anything but the designing, although I was repeatedly told that the Smiths made no money. They lost less, they said. One day they came in to ask me if they could set up an out-of-town factory in my name.

Why? Because they wanted to run a non-union shop with cheaper wages and to do it they must go to Connecticut. They must take another name or they would be caught, the shop in New York where the bags had been made having been unionized.

My manager said why not, I wouldn't be liable for any debts. It could all be arranged. I laughed. My courses in Labor Problems at Vassar went through my head. "By the time I'm through with this business," I said, "I'll know every little trick. Go ahead."

I, meanwhile, was being prodded into further action by Lord and Taylor and the depression. It was not satisfactory for them to buy dress models from me and have them manufactured by someone else. They had to pay out extra money for the original model.

On the other hand, I was getting very little more for an original model from them than I did from any customer for a dress. Lord and Taylor told me I should work directly with a dress manufacturer so they could buy stock.

Stock is what a department store has to have, not one dress in one color, but rows of that dress, pink, blue, brown, black. Of all the American Designers promoted in 1933, only Clare Potter worked for a wholesaler and was really in a position to qualify for selling in mass production.

I was becoming intrigued with department store clothes. The minute I saw that hundreds of women could have Hawes clothes, I wanted thousands to wear them.

This was the beginning of Miss Elizabeth Hawes running a two-, three-, sometimes four-ring circus for the next few years. These are the years which made me appreciate my ivory tower, yes, but much more. These are the years during which I discovered that what a lady bought and paid for when she purchased a \$15.75 dress was possibly \$10 of dress plus \$5.75 of obstinate stupidity on the part of the dress manufacturer.

The stupidities of the French Legend were as apparent to my customers as to me. I didn't dream of the flimsiness of the Great American Boast, that all women here can have beautiful clothes because we have conquered mass production.

I now got right inside Fashion's bright cellophane wrapper.



WHEN the banks closed in March of 1933, exactly three days after I had shown my new collection, I was taken aback, to put it mildly.

My fitter, who was Viennese, fell to pieces in my office and said that in every country she'd ever worked in, the min-

ute she saved up a few dollars, the banks closed, and now here it was in America. I was afraid we wouldn't sell a dress and the entire workroom would starve to death. We canvassed them and found that ninety percent of them were the sole support of families on their munificent salaries of \$25 a week. I had never given a wage cut since I started in 1929.

I made them a fantastic proposition: if they'd all work for whatever they had to have, I'd arrange to see them through until the following fall somehow, including their bi-annual lay-off in the summer. This meant I wanted to pay some of them who had husbands working \$15 a week and others who had three children \$25, regardless of their former salaries. I figured they'd been working together for several years and would coöperate with one another.

Of course, they simply didn't know what I was talking about. They never could think more than one payroll ahead even in good times. One of them, a spinster who earned \$35 a week as a draper, emphatically told me that she was in the habit of giving so much a week to the Catholic church and couldn't get on with less than her present wage!

A couple of them said they'd do anything I suggested. The rest remained stonily silent. So I just slashed their wages from a base of \$25 to a base of \$18 and the Catholic lady quit, together with two others who afterward were forced to return. It was a horrid time for all of us.

I would have saved myself a lot of trouble by just cutting the wages in the beginning as everyone else did. My staff of two models and an assistant salesgirl came around and offered to work for \$15 a week, whereat we all had a good cry and got to work.

I notified the customers I would make them clothes for anything they had to spend and, when the season ended, I

found I had broken even! In the meantime, since we were not deluged with orders, I had plenty of time for thought.

I thought, in general, about Mary Lewis and how she had told me Ford made his money out of Fords, not Lincolns. And, specifically, I thought about the wholesale business. I wanted to talk to somebody about my ideas, and Amos Parrish had been one of my best advisors in the past. He, I felt, would listen sympathetically to what I had in mind about me and the wholesale business.

When I saw him, I told him that I could design twice as many things as I did, anyway, so why not do it for the wholesale. That irritating man probably produced the right answer, disregarding depressions, and knowing me a little.

He said, "If you can design twice as many clothes, why don't you throw away half the designs before you make them?"

He turned me over, however, to a gentleman in his office named Ray Kraemer, a small, sharp-featured man with glasses. Mr. Kraemer said, "I wouldn't take Bergdorf Goodman or Hattie Carnegie for a gift. The way to make money in this town is to own S. Klein and sell \$3.75s."

He was entirely right. The problem, as it later unfolded itself to me, was: Is it worth it? He was the gentleman who told me at dinner one night that there wasn't any occasion for the fabric manufacturers of America to back designers. "There will always be fools like you," he said, "who will own businesses like yours."

I hated him for he was right again. Anyway, the French understand. People like Mr. Kraemer make me quite sentimental over Mr. Rodier.

At that very instant, I owed Mr. Rodier enough money so he could have put me out of business any minute. I used almost exclusively French fabrics, mostly Rodier, Bianchini,

and Ducharne. These gentlemen, in the persons of their American representatives, kept me going through the depression.

Certainly they wanted me to use and to be able to continue to use their fabrics, and certainly I paid plenty for them. Equally certainly, due to the exigencies of running a shop like Hawes Inc. which I shall further unfold in a later chapter, had it not been for the credit in money, and advice and encouragement given me, notably by Mr. Newberg of Bianchini, I would not be alive to tell the tale.

Perhaps I might better have spent my time in 1933 communing with the French than with American Big Business. But somehow or other, I had to have my fling. Also, for a brief moment, I was intrigued with the idea of making more than a subsistence wage. "Ford makes his. . . ."

I finally found a new advisor in the person of Louis Kirstein, the head of a large group of stores including Filene in Boston and Bloomingdale in New York. He, out of the bigness of his heart, told a man in his office to find a wholesale dress manufacturer with whom I could work.

One day in the spring of '33 I was called to Mr. Kirstein's office. His assistant said, "Well, I've found someone for you. I think you can get on with him. He is really a fine man. He's *honest*."

I was slightly taken back. Lo and behold, with the passage of the years I had forgotten Mr. Weinstock and all his and my dealings. The wholesale clothing manufacturer had crept back into my life via the stealing of my leather jacket and I had accepted him as a matter of course. That was the way business was done. Ordinarily no one goes so far as to suggest that any dress manufacturer is either honest or dishonest. Actually it is rather taken for granted that everyone is out to gyp everyone else on Seventh Avenue.

Seventh Avenue is the general term used to denote the entire wholesale clothing business in New York. In Paris they have La Couture. Here we have Seventh Avenue.

Seventh Avenue is a wide street, flanked by many small skyscrapers. The blocks from Forty-second Street down to Thirty-fourth Street are given over to clothing all American women. The street is jammed not only with vans and cars, but with many, many boys who push little trucks endlessly from building to building. The trucks are filled with bolts of material or dresses on hangers.

At noon time, the block between Broadway and Seventh Avenue at Forty-first Street is entirely given over to hundreds and hundreds of somberly clothed men who stand there, smoking and talking. These are the men who cut the clothes. They herd there every day.

When the working day is over, thousands of dark-haired Jews from Poland and Russia, Lithuania and Germany, pour from their sewing machines into Seventh Avenue. They are the skilled craftsmen and women of the American couture.

Hour after patient hour, they cut and sew up the dresses, coats, and suits which clothe the great American womanhood. Thousands more like them, and also of good old American Nordic stock, are engaged in the same occupation in small towns and cities outside New York.

Out of town they are sweated and exploited, kicked and underpaid. They hive in cellars where they get \$9 a week for fifty-four hours of sewing up your \$4.95.

In New York, they are organized, that hated word. They are better paid and work thirty-five hours a week. They are laid off many weeks in the year, and all the weeks of the year their work is speeded up. They are spit upon and they are known to the outside world as "dirty Jews." People say

they're un-American. Kick 'em out. Let 'em go back where they came from.

Their bosses call them kikes and say to hell with their rotten unions. What right have they got trying to run my business?

But every day the skilled craftspeople of this great American couture turn up on Seventh Avenue just the same, and sew and sew and sew for the purpose of clothing the American woman beautifully.

They do not decide how small the seams are to be, how cheap the silk, how quickly the garment is to be finished. They do as they are told.

Out of their midst rise many of the Weinstocks, the Leo Levines, and the Joe Rosenthals who are the captains of the American dress industry. They, or their fathers, came to the promised land and managed to start their own little businesses. If they learned their lessons well, the little businesses grew into big ones. Leo turns into Leo Levine.

Now Leo Levine has money. He has a big automobile and he goes to Paris. He plays the stock market or buys real estate. He becomes an American. He often says wonderful things to you, in his new language. He watches the dresses go by, his dresses on his mannequins in his showroom. He narrows his eyes, takes a puff on his cigar. "Look at the carriage of that dress," he sighs with a dreamy look.

Leo Levine was trained in a hard school. He does unto others as he was done by. Naturally he doesn't treat his workers any better than his boss treated him. He was taught by his boss to save four yards of material on every hundred dresses even if the seams did split. He learns quickly, watching Joe Rosenthal, how to sit at ease in Patou's salon and watch Elizabeth Hawes take her little notes for his sketches.

Joe Rosenthal, another leader on Seventh Avenue, didn't

rise from the ranks. His father saved enough to send him to Columbia and set him up in business. But when he got onto Seventh Avenue, he found it was Leo Levine's street and the Levine psychology which dominated there. Joe Rosenthal found that if he wanted to compete with Leo Levine, he better cut out the seams and try to get a better price on the material.

Since Leo never had anything to start with and was educated to believe in getting into the big money as fast as possible, by any of the few means at his disposal, he is an inveterate gambler. Most of the money he makes on Seventh Avenue is lost on Wall Street.

He runs his business like a gambling establishment and exhibits his most unforgivable fault in a world devoted to business efficiency. At the end of a season, when things are added up, if Leo has made money, okay. If he hasn't, he shuts up that shop and starts another.

Joe Rosenthal doesn't run his business in any such manner. He has accountants and even efficiency experts. He figures cost correctly. But right around the corner is Leo Levine who hoisted himself up by his own bootstrap and has learned one only pays for what one can't obtain by other means. Leo Levine copies all Rosenthal's best sellers, at a lower price of course.

An organization is formed, at the instigation of Joe Rosenthal et al., and Levine and Co. are taken in. It is an organization to prevent copying. The ball is tossed to the department stores. If any store is found selling a copy of one of Mr. Rosenthal's—or Mr. Levine's—dresses, all the members of the particular manufacturers organization agree not to sell that store any more dresses at all until such a time as the store promises to be good.

Joe Rosenthal has now got Leo Levine where he wants him. He's fixed things so Leo simply can't copy Rosenthal's

clothes. A cause celebre against one of the large department stores found selling a copy of a registered dress is won by the organization. Leo Levine makes a speech celebrating the victory of Seventh Avenue. The majority of the manufacturers who belong to the organization shake hands and leave by the next boat for Paris where they all obtain as many sketches as possible. They all obtain the same sketches, and return home to start a new season, competing on the price of the copies of the sketches which they have promised not to steal from one another.

The clothing business is the second largest in the United States. Some day it may well be run like the United States Steel, which it surpasses in volume. In the meantime, there is just one little item which neither Leo Levine nor Jose Rosenthal can ever figure out. It happens to be the foundation upon which their entire business is based, regardless of how it may be run.

It is a thing to which they subscribe, in which they believe. It is called Fashion.

Levine and Rosenthal alike are completely bamboozled by Fashion. They never know what kind of dress to make next. They never know whether skirts are going to continue short or get long or turn into trousers overnight. They feed the entire super-structure of fashion press and department stores, but they have never been able to find out what to feed it when.

The manufacturers' only contact with the public is through the department store buyer. Her chief contact with the public is through her salesgirls. She doesn't hear much about individual customers from them. She seldom sees customers herself.

The buyer secretly wishes the manufacturer would tell her what to buy. He wishes she'd tell him what to make.

Often she does. They both rely mostly on Paris to give them the tip off, Paris, and the comparative shopping department.

The manufacturer has a comparison shopping department which goes out in the person of a sketcher and brings him news of what the other manufacturers are making. Most dress manufacturers get on with no designers at all. They simply look around, buy some sketches, talk things over with some buyers, discuss the whole matter with the head cutter. The head cutter, who considers himself a designer, proceeds to make up a "line."

He never finishes making up a line. Day in and day out, he makes more models. As soon as he has finished the seventy or eighty which make up the first line of any season, he begins to "fill in." Since the manufacturer himself has no individualized taste but relies entirely on the opinion of his customers, he throws out of the first line all the dresses which don't appeal to a large number of buyers.

The cutter fills in with other dresses which are in turn thrown out and replaced by more models. He has no particular reason for making anything he puts in. But he never starts a dress he doesn't finish. He runs up new models in a couple of days. When they're finished, the boss and the sales force look them over. They put them in the line or throw them away. The waste is terrific.

It is not as though they were constantly trying out really *new* things. All the filling in is done on the same basic patterns month after month. It is the proud boast of some wholesalers that they make up a whole line with only three dress patterns. The newness, so loudly called for, is new trimming, new collars and cuffs, new glass buttons, new clips, new flowers, and all of this, not too new, please.

Nobody ever does a scientific job of figuring out where the public taste has gotten, whether the women are ready to

wear high waists or long skirts or whatever. They hoot at you when you suggest all this trying out is absolutely unnecessary and very costly besides. To them, what they call fashion is a mystery which they will never understand. Fashion does manage to be a mystery most of the time, but style, of course, is different.

Fashion is a mystery because it's something which developed with no relation to the public taste or need. Sometimes, if it is highly enough promoted, a fashion gets by for a short time. Sometimes a fashion turns out to be amusing, like tying a handkerchief around your head instead of wearing a hat. That, in fact, threatens to become a style. It is so simple and practical.

One year at Hawes Inc. we were amused to embroider "Yes" on the palm of a woolen glove and "No" on the back of its mate. It was silly and everyone bought the gloves, wore them and threw them away. If the embroidery could have been done in mass production, which it couldn't, it might have been a fashion for a very short time.

Every single season the flower manufacturers put on shows and send out news that certain flowers are right or chic or indispensable. Sometimes it just happens that flowers really chime in with the type of dress being worn. Sometimes the spring is so wonderful and life is so gay, the women all feel like pinning a flower on their coats. Then certain flowers are fashionable. Sometimes the women just don't want to wear flowers and so the flower manufacturers have a bad time and complain that one can never tell about the public taste.

Sometimes well-known designers in Paris put out dresses with lots of sequins. The American dress manufacturers all proceed to put out dresses with sequins, lots of dresses with lots of sequins. The stores promote them. Sequins are said to

be the fashion. The dresses sell only in cheap versions. The manufacturers say you can never tell about the public taste. The manufacturers, some of them, anyway, have been in business for decades. They don't seem to realize that sequins are relatively expensive in France. Here we can almost all remember a thousand cheap, tawdry little sequin dresses, straight, knee-length, hanging in Broadway shops.

Here we know that sequins are cheap and if they get started again, there will be an indigestion of them. Naturally, most women who pay a good price for an evening dress don't want sequins here. Aside from the snob element involved, the association of Theda Bara and the sequin robe, it is just too easy to get absolutely sick of the sight of a sequin.

Even if nothing were involved but the snob element, any intelligent business man should be fully aware of its workings. Let the \$4.95s have sequins, Joe Rosenthal. Your more expensive clientele are not unpredictable. They won't want them.

And again and again, why, oh why, Joe Rosenthal, were you so surprised when skirts got long and waists natural? For three long years it had been coming. It was a *style*, Mr. Rosenthal. Style is never unpredictable.

But Rosenthal and Levine are not occupied with style. They believe that everything changes twice a year and they want it to. Otherwise people wouldn't have to buy so many clothes. Nor are the manufacturers occupied with quality because it wears and makes future buying unnecessary. They are not concerned with whether clothes are useful or beautiful or functional. That, apparently, is not a part of their job.

The obvious reason I ultimately caused so much trouble

for N. H. Nibs was because I didn't understand when I took the job just what it was all about. Mr. Nibs was the dress manufacturer whom Mr. Kirstein's assistant found for me.



MR. NIBS was a second cousin of Joe Rosenthal. He was tall, gray-haired, black-eyed, and nervous. He was tired.

I am sure when Mr. Nibs first went into the wholesale business, eighteen years before I met him, he was quite able

to cope with it all. Fashion hadn't speeded things up to the point where one had to at least pretend that things changed every week or so. Mr. Nibs originally had a stable business in older women's dresses.

Fashion overtook him—fashion and bad times. One of the standard jokes of the wholesale trade goes like this: You point to a dress at an opening and say, "That's a good woman's dress." To which your interlocutor responds, "There are no good women any more."

Certainly the number of women who wanted Mr. Nibs' good women's dresses diminished. The depression finally set in in earnest. Like practically all the manufacturers who subsequently crossed my path, Mr. Nibs sought to counteract the depression by trying something different.

He went all the way when he hired and publicized an American Designer. I am sure he must often have regretted the whole incident, although I know he feels, as I do, that if I hadn't been trained to make expensive clothes to order (and liked it), he and I might have worked out beautifully together. He was stubborn but not immovable, and he was a thoroughly honest man.

I hired myself out to him the end of May, 1933, for \$100 a week cash and a commission on his gross business. My job was to do all the designing on my own hours. I was still, of course, running Hawes Inc. uptown.

N. H. Nibs was a house which specialized in sportswear at prices ranging from \$10.95 to \$39.50 wholesale. You double all wholesale prices, approximately, to get the retail price.

A very odd thing about the wholesale business is that all the houses specialize. Most of them have never had a designer in any real sense of the word, and it is probably easier for them to concentrate on one kind of clothes. For a de-

signer, it is insane. The minute one has an idea for sport clothes, one sees the rest of the clothes the women will want.

Since most wholesalers are not used to working with real designers, they regard it as their right and duty to tell whomever is trying to fulfill that function what to design. They say, "Make me up six little satin afternoon dresses." You should instantly have six ideas for satin. You are not supposed to like or dislike any kind of material or any kind of cut. You, as a wholesale designer, are supposed to turn out automatically three or four new designs a week, fifty-two weeks a year, in whatever material anyone wants on whatever lines anyone chooses. This is one good reason why few real designers have been able to work on Seventh Avenue.

And besides the wholesale designer on Seventh Avenue is supposed to design twelve months of the year. Inevitably she runs dry. She has to run to Paris for help, or she'll get thrown out. The wholesalers continually change designers, taking in one and throwing out another.

If the wholesale dress business were run for the purpose of creating style, each designer would turn out her hundred new ideas with their variations every year, thoughtfully and carefully. She would have time to see the public for which she works, maybe even talk to it.

As it is, the cry for "something new," something new to advertise, something new to show the buyers, something new to catch the public eye, is an unceasing din, dulling the senses, stopping the imagination of almost every Seventh Avenue designer.

I do not mean to suggest that there are no really creative designers on Seventh Avenue. There are a few who own and design for their own businesses. Some of them are known to the public, such as Clare Potter, who is a partner in her firm.

In general, the wholesale dress manufacturer is not anx-

ious to have his designer become known for the very simple reason that it gives the designer too much power. If she is a successful designer, she is married into or taken into the firm as fast as possible for fear she may leave, lured by a higher salary.

In any case, whatever her status in any firm not her own, there are certainly few wholesale designers who are allowed to work out their designs without interference. The interference is occasioned by the boss's fear of Fashion. He will not believe that any human being really understands it. He will believe, in his heart of hearts and usually quite openly and loudly, that the French make it and only they can know what to do about it next. Obviously he must therefore believe Parisian designers are some sort of goddesses.

Of late years it has become the fashion among wholesale dress manufacturers to say that the Paris designers aren't so hot after all. But, as the manufacturers say it, they are either hastily examining a pile of French sketches or catching a boat for the land of God.

In the beginning of my career at Nibs, my boss had the proper respect for me. He let me alone to do what I liked. My newspaper clippings had put the fear of my personal God into him. In fact, everyone in the place kept looking at me nervously out of the corner of their eyes for months. They expected me to have "temperament." Maybe I would have gotten on better if I'd displayed it.

I set to work to make my first line in June 1933. The gentleman who was to make the models for me was named Mr. Meyer. He was an angel. He was about my height, only twice my width, bald and shiny. He had wonderful big scissors which he wielded with great skill. He began by trying his best to do what I asked.

He found I knew something about making clothes which

helped a lot. I found he knew how to make clothes just one way which didn't help at all. He made all skirts tight, and I mean tight. He made all waists with tucks so they could be "cut for large sizes." He made all dresses too small across the back and set in all sleeves wrong after cutting them too small in the armhole.

He thought very slowly, and accurately according to his own ideas. If you told him to do something he either didn't know how to do or didn't want to do, he said yes and didn't do it. He cut the original models directly in the final material without one inch of leeway for alteration of any kind. He had them sewed up by his very expert sample makers in a few hours.

You'd give him a sketch one morning and when you came back from lunch there would be a dress, not what you had in mind, but a dress. The neckline would be too low and too wide, the waist-line would be straight where yours was curved, the sleeve would be tight where yours was to have been full, the skirt would have just enough flare to look as if the seams hadn't been sewn straight.

And there would be Mr. Meyer, beaming and perspiring and proud. It was heartbreaking. He'd never really made designs, just more and more models, all cut from one basic pattern. He considered himself a designer and he was very, very touchy on the subject. If he hadn't been a perfect gentleman and I hadn't been so profoundly sure he was trying to do his best, we would have knocked one another down twice a day.

As it was, we turned out a line of dresses and suits which wasn't bad at all. I was feeling my way and being conservative. Conservative for me is already daring for Seventh Avenue. I made color combinations of red and purple and blue which seemed to me quite banal and knocked the sales force dead.

The clothes sold. They sold because we promoted them. Wheee . . . what my Hawes Inc. manager and I didn't tell the department store world Hawes had done. We got out a big folder with reprints of clippings. It was a wonderful job. First we told just who Hawes was, *the* American designer. Then we went into details about my retail shop with reprints of Fontanne and Hepburn and socialites wearing my clothes. We related how Lord and Taylor had called for my wares, how I had done this and that small job for wholesalers. Finally, we told them, I had broken down and here oh here were Hawes clothes for all the world to have. Here, at N. H. Nibs, was a new fall line of Elizabeth Hawes originals at prices anyone could afford.

We completed the job by showing the stores how to advertise the clothes, reprinting copies of my ads, and by telling them how to instruct the sales force to sell the clothes.

I finished up the first line the end of June, 1933. We had redecorated the showroom which was previously one of the more sordid sights, beige walls, beige shades, brown wooden partitions between the tables where the buyers had sat at brown wooden tables on brown wooden chairs and looked over a brown rug at "women's dresses."

In the wholesale business, each buyer, or group of buyers, is separated from his neighbor by some sort of screen, curtain or partition. This is so he can't see what the other buyer is buying, supposedly. Actually, everyone knows what everyone else is doing because the salesmen all tell. The partitions serve the useful purpose of making the buyer concentrate on the clothes instead of the other customers.

I desperately called in Ted Muller who does all my decorating, pried a few hundred dollars out of Mr. Nibs. Ted got Venetian blinds which looked clean and white, painted the walls yellow, painted the entrance hall brown and put a

couple of white leather chairs in it and one little glass topped table. We added some orangey curtains to the windows and although it was not entirely what our hearts desired, it did look as if there might possibly be some dress there which hadn't been designed eighteen years before.

Ted had his troubles which are worth mentioning because they are so perfectly indicative of Seventh Avenue technique. Everything which was finally decided upon, a chair, a table, a blind, a piece of curtain material, had to be gotten cheaper through some friend of some salesman or relative of N. H. Nibs.

The net result is what always comes of that method of buying. Everything was very late in coming. We did not quite manage to finish the decorating by the time the clothes were to be shown. And each individual item was a little wrong. Days were spent getting a certain curtain material for a nickel a yard less than the regular wholesale price. All in all, time being no object in hunting for a cheaper version, I am sure an easy \$15 was saved on the decorating job, at whatever expense of wear and tear on nerves and ultimate effect.

When it was all finished, the sales force complained that the brown walls in the entrance were too dark, despite the white ceiling. They hadn't previously been exposed to anything even remotely resembling modern decoration. To cheer them up, I brought down a scroll which Noguchi had given me, a long white sheet with a most lovely pair of hands done on it in wash. Across the hands, completing the design, was a swirl of grey paint.

It all proved most devastating. Several weeks passed before anyone dared ask me about it. One day when I was trying to make friends with these three or four gentlemen who were to have the pain and pleasure of selling Hawes' first

wholesale line, one of them broke down, "Miss Hawes, just exactly why is that smudge on those hands?" he asked confidentially.

"Why, I don't know," I said. "It completes the composition, I suppose."

"What's the composition?" he bravely asked.

I considered all the courses I had taken at Vassar in French, Dutch, Italian and modern painting. I looked at his rather soft face with its quite brutal mouth. "It's ART," I said.

They all looked completely satisfied. Art and fashion were two things they never hoped to fathom. Most of them know that style is out of date. I can't imagine where Seventh Avenue salesmen come from. They are a race all by themselves. Some of them undoubtedly rise by good hard work from the stockroom or errand field. They get kicked around and if they can take it and still retain an atom of energy, they may get to be salesmen.

A lot of them are related to the boss. Heavens. If Mr. Nibs would have just given a check to his relatives every month instead of employing them! There were any number of them, mostly inefficient, helping to run things. One or two of them sold clothes.

Selling clothes on Seventh Avenue is very special. It consists in making friends with the buyers. That is the superstition, at least, on which the selling force operates.

I've met plenty of buyers, worked with a number. They are a lonesome lot. They come into Paris from New York or they come into New York from all over the United States. They want to be taken to dinner. They have no real friends in the cities they must travel through in their buying.

They want to go to the theatre. They love presents like everyone else. But they're not, by and large, I think, open to

bribery. Mine is not by a long shot, the opinion which motivates the vast amount of present-giving and entertaining in which Seventh Avenue salesmen engage.

One year when I went freight-boating to Haiti, there was one other passenger, a dress salesman from Seventh Avenue. I asked him what he was doing on the boat and he explained to me that it was between seasons and he was going to buy presents for his buyers, perfume. Perfume enters the islands of the Caribbean without duty and costs there about half what it does in New York.

He bought a good \$300 of perfume, for \$150, so he saved the price of the trip and, so to speak, lived three weeks for nothing on the boat. I helped him take some in on my duty-free hundred dollars, and he paid no customs.

He assured me—from my experience at Nibs I am sure it is true—that he gave every buyer who dealt with him a Christmas present to begin with. Then he *must* entertain her when she was in New York. He said he hated entertaining out-of-town buyers but if he didn't do it, they'd buy nothing from him.

I think this may be partially true since most dress manufacturers compete only on the matter of price. If the buyer can get what she wants in a good many places, she may humanly incline toward those whose salesmen have given her the most in entertainment and presents.

I suppose the reason that most Seventh Avenue salesmen look so brutal is because they're tired of entertaining visiting buyers. I expect the reason they know nothing about style or fashion is because they give all their attention to knowing those buyers and feeding them drinks.

When the time comes to sell the new line, all they do is say, "Mabel, will you go to the Casino with me Friday? I think you had better buy that black dress. Haldane's buyer,

whom I took out last night, bought it this morning. It must be good."

Now the chances are that Mabel knows perfectly well whether or not she should buy that black dress. And the Haldane buyer would have bought it if she liked it whether the salesman had taken her to dinner or not.

The selling methods of dress salesmen are a source of marvel not only to a simple girl like myself but to all of those many experts who have ever studied the matter of selling in this highly specialized age. It is nothing but tradition which governs selling on Seventh Avenue, a tradition which belongs to the dear dead past when buyers were another species. Thousands of dollars are spent on the entertaining and present-giving which might just as well be saved instead of being passed on to the public in higher prices.

The Nibs sales force behaved in the traditional way, and my experiences there only served to prove the lack of validity in their method. My manager and myself and our promotional ideas got plenty of buyers into Nibs that first season who had never set foot in there before. We gave them no presents or entertainment. We gave their advertising departments plenty of hoop-la to work with. We showed them quite nice clothes. They bought.

Mr. Nibs' sales went up a couple of hundred thousand dollars over the season before. I was the white-haired girl. Everybody loved me.

When the news of the Paris collections came over in August, they even reported some of the colors I'd used. All my ideas had been correct, even the fabrics. I hadn't done a thing which hadn't been shown at Hawes Inc. a couple of years before. They thought I was a miracle girl.

But it didn't last long.

18 . *I Buy an Ivory Tower*



ONLY a quadruple exposed negative could give the faintest idea of my life from the spring of 1933 for the following year. Up to then I had been going to work at nine and leaving any time from five to seven, yes. But, by comparison, life had been one long vacation.

All over-lapping, each being discussed while the other was being done, came jobs and ideas and Hawes Inc. in a torrent of activity.

The clipping books of ads for that period go something like this:

From *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1933, "Said Elizabeth Hawes to Elizabeth Hawes *Lingees* are the answer for your design for living," an ad for a set of underwear I did to promote American Enka Yarn. A Best and Co. ad of an evening coat, showing the material of Sidney Blumenthal as used by Hawes. "*Elizabeth Hawes* cuts into cotton for Marshall Field manufacturers" in *Women's Wear*, April 7, 1933, page announcement of a series of dresses they hired me to do to exploit cheap cotton. "Elizabeth Hawes has a way with a brim," a little fling into the world of hat designing for Lord and Taylor. In August begin the dozens of ads from all over the United States, "*We Have Clothes by Elizabeth Hawes*," my first designs for N. H. Nibs; interspersed with "*The Emporium* (or any other store you like) *Leads* in important new accessory fashions for fall"; "Elizabeth Hawes antelope bags," from Smith Co.; followed by "Appetizers," a set of little jackets done for an accessory house; "Elizabeth Hawes square bracelet," in the jewelry field. And, in the middle of it all, among the underclothes and the bracelets, the jaunts to N. H. Nibs daily and the discussions about little jackets, in September, 1933, comes a page, printed on Hawes stationery:

We have moved . . . and we have more people to take care of you . . . more room to take care of you. On the first floor, at last, plenty of space for ordering and fitting hats . . . bags of our own design . . . some ready-made sport things. On the second floor, a fine large showroom

etc. . . . On the third floor, enough and large enough fitting rooms!

Consider, too, our budget system. You figure out what you have that is still good, what you will need for a season, how much you have to spend. We wangle it out, clothes hats and bags.

We are open from ten to five . . . except Saturdays . . . Miss Hawes may be seen by appointment . . . We cordially invite you to come and see our fall collection . . . we enjoy showing it to people who appreciate beautiful clothes, whether they buy or not.

The minute I signed up with N. H. Nibs, I set to work to enlarge my own business. It was the low point of the depression, but it seemed to me that if, at the same time I began to make cheap clothes, I did not make it quite clear to my private public that I was going to continue to supply their wants in a better and bigger way, I might be swallowed by Seventh Avenue.

I was influenced by several other things. We had outgrown our quarters on 56th Street so that we gave not even a modicum of comfort to the customers either in ordering, trying on or fitting the clothes and hats.

I thought I could cover the expense of moving by the money I would receive from Nibs. Hawes Inc. must grow up or die. One can't go on being discovered on one floor forever. One will never be discovered by a good many people on one floor.

The latter fact is one of the most interesting things about being an expensive dressmaker in New York. You must be really expensive. I will outline a conversation to make the point. The conversation took place between me and a Mrs. X. She was a very attractive young society matron. She was not rich at the time. I talked to her about bringing me some customers while she looked at the clothes one day.

"How much is that dress?" she kept asking.

"One hundred sixty-five dollars," I would answer, or \$145, or \$175, as the case might be.

"It's funny," she said. "I don't think I have any friends who pay those prices." I was quite bewildered.

"You know," she continued thoughtfully, "all my friends either go to Mary Penn and pay \$79.50 or they go to Hattie Carnegie and don't care what they pay."

After a good deal of thought, I saw that what she said was true. Generally speaking there were a large number of women who either bought, to them, inexpensive ready-made clothes or were used to paying much higher prices than I charged. They were not interested in shopping on one floor on 56th Street where they had to stand in line for fittings and there weren't enough salespeople to look after them properly.

I saw that, although I had a monopoly on Hawes designs and could, therefore, be sure of a certain amount of trade, I must begin to compete in services with the "high-class" specialty shops of New York or I could not hope to grow.

I never did over \$60,000 a year on 56th Street and this was not enough to support me to making the kind of expensive collection I wanted to indulge in. I wanted to be able to use material at \$20 a yard and fur and anything my fancy craved.

On the one hand, at Nibs, I was fascinated to see how cheaply decent clothes could be made. On the other hand, I wanted the opportunity of making what I pleased, regardless of price. What the latter involved, I knew. About the former, I learned.

We, Jim Hicks, my manager, Ted Muller, the architect, and I, set out to find all the space and air any customer could want, and a place for them to park their cars. We found the

house on 67th Street in late July, after days and nights of trailing about the area where traffic is lighter and business is permitted.

The house was, still is, five stories high, about twenty-five feet wide, plain gray stone-fronted, high-ceilinged and big-windowed. Inside it was all Louis something and we had about six weeks to tear out the interior decoration and simplify.

With one hand I worked on 56th Street, making up the fall collection, with another hand, I filled-in the Nibs line, and with my third hand I picked out colors for walls and furniture and generally inserted myself into the problems of Ted Muller and the contractor. My fourth hand wrote out ads and mailing pieces for the fall.

It was fun, exhausting, devastating fun. We tore out moldings and partitions to the despair of the contractor, who insisted we were taking everything beautiful out of the building. It was a pity I didn't feel like living in the time of the Louis' in old France. We could have just swept out the place and moved in. However, it had to have three-colored walls and Venetian blinds and no mouldings and no carpets and be clean and neat and 1933.

We were approaching our objective with top speed when, just ten days before what was to be a gala opening, the painters struck all over town. I quite well recall the evening Ted and Jim met up with me in a bar near 56th Street to tell me the bad news.

"The place will definitely not be finished for the opening," they said, over the first drink.

"Shall we put it off?" we asked over the second.

"Hell with the paint," we said over the third Tom Collins, "Let's open anyway."

We had quite a fine housewarming one night in September

ber 1933, with canvas on the floor and white plaster walls. Downstairs, the decoration consisted of a line of dressmakers, dummies with signs. "Contractors are unfair to union labor."

This entrance room later, when the strike was finished, was painted battleship gray and white and is now the accessory shop where we sell "Yes and No" gloves, false brocoli to wear in your buttonhole, fuchsia cotton stockings, *soft* bags, belts, scarfs and anything else which strikes our fancy including a whistle to be worn on the watch chain of your beau when he is not using it to call a taxi.

The night of the housewarming, my official fall opening, the widely winding stairs went up to a brilliant scene. The present polished parquet floor was neatly draped with rumpled canvas. The walls, now half-gray, half-beige, were raw white plaster which came off quite easily on neat black evening clothes. The three windows on the front of the house, bare of their future rust curtains, yawned blackly from ceiling to floor and out into the night.

Out in the night, beyond the middle window, was the first Hawes flag, waving from its unpainted pole, battleship gray with my scissors and H trademark in white. It still waves whenever Hawes Inc. is in residence.

In place of my blue and rust furniture, my little white leather chairs which look so very silly, as if they were dancing, whenever they get out of order on a busy afternoon, there were just rows and rows of brown folding chairs. The background, all in all, was stark.

Upstairs, where offices and fitting rooms would be, there was a bar and food. And wandering on up, in those days one came to a big room in front, my office, another in the rear with a terrace outside it, my bedroom. Above that, two little rooms in back housed our houseman and my maid. The whole

front of the fifth floor was made into one big living room where I relaxed for the next four years. Now the top of the house is all workroom and I am blessed with one tiny ex-maid's room for an office.

The guests on the night of the housewarming, came pouring in between ten and ten-thirty, stumbled over the strike signs, fell on the canvas floor and generally established themselves, drinks in hand, for the show. That season the clothes were all named for songs, everything from Rock-a-bye-Baby, being a batiste negligee, to the kind of evening dress called Blue Moon.

We always start with sport clothes and go on through the day and evening things. Evening shows are most fun because the audience are my friends and they don't hesitate to express themselves with shouts or boos as the fancy takes them.

Usually we break the show in the middle with some sort of oddity. That time we showed six or eight dresses from 1925, long waisted and short skirted, and awful enough to make you cry to think you ever were seen like that. Thank heaven I didn't have to design in those days.

It usually takes a little over an hour for six girls to show about eighty different models, coats, suits, dresses, furs, evening clothes, wraps, negligees. I used to suffer terribly at my openings and always went upstairs and had a quiet drink with the butler until it was over. Now I don't mind so much. I simply don't listen to what anyone says about the clothes because I knew they all have to say it's wonderful.

A day or two after an opening I get together with a few people who know me well enough to speak their minds and am told off for what is bad and patted on the back for the good things. By the time you've made some eighteen collections of clothes, you get a fairly good critical idea about any given collection. Anyway, the customers tell you with orders.

Practically all the fall 1933 business was done with no showroom and no fitting rooms. It took six weeks from the time we opened the place before the paint was even on the walls. The customers put up with worse inconveniences than they'd ever had at 56th Street. It was the beginning of the spring 1934 season before we were actually in running order.

I was a full-fledged couturière. I could give the service of a specialty shop plus that reason for all my work, my own designs and nothing else, made to order and to fit and you couldn't buy it anywhere else.

And so came the establishment of policies and the long long fight to pay for it all. I learned exactly why expensive clothes are so expensive, and why, although shops like Hawes have a reputation for being thorough-going thieves, it is not necessarily so.

To explain that I paid plenty for the privilege of becoming a couturière, I will say parenthetically that it took me three years to get even. I borrowed and put in as capital \$10,000 in July 1933, the loan of a kind friend. At the end of the first year on 67th Street, June 1934, I had collected \$12,000 from N. H. Nibs which went into Hawes Inc. I showed a loss on the books of \$12,000 for operations at Hawes Inc. I broke even, therefore, on the books, having lost exactly the new capital investment and all I earned on Seventh Avenue.

There are ways of thieving from one's customers in the made-to-order dress business. However, in general, one deals with a very wary public.

It is an old adage that the richer people are, the more economical they are. People who are used to having a great deal of money to spend are not in the habit of throwing it away. They may buy yachts, mink coats, country houses and

Rolls Royces, but they usually only pay what the article is worth in a competitive market. They shop around and they know the value of what they buy.

In America it is true there are a number of people who have only recently gotten wealthy enough to buy the luxuries of life. Of those who can pay, it is they who get cheated. They have an idea that they should spend carelessly, not ask the price, throw their money around. This kind of customer is cheated by some dressmakers and specialty shops, as she is cheated by furriers, servants, jewelers, and everyone who cares to try.

This is the kind of customer who does not know a good material from a bad one, and by that I mean, what will wear and what won't. In general, I might add for the benefit of shops which are not, apparently, concerned with the wearing qualities of the clothes they sell at any price, that the kind of customer who can be cheated often does not care at all whether her dress wears or not.

This leads to the substitution of materials, a more expensive one being used in the model than is used for making up the order. So, the dressmaker may save a few dollars a yard here.

Secondly, the customer who is cheated is one who doesn't apparently care whether or not her clothes fit. Often women who spend the most money for clothes in New York, as I have said, buy ready-made things at prices from \$125 to \$250, prices for which clothes can be and are made-to-order.

This baffled me when I first came from Paris to New York. Finally I realized two things. One of them is that a lot of women in America are just too busy to come for fittings. The other is that there are a great number of American women who don't know whether their clothes fit them or not even when the dress is made to order.

The latter point used to harass me dreadfully when I started my business. I realized that it was a matter of my own pride in a number of cases whether the dress which we made for a customer fitted or not. She didn't know. I have a minimal number of this kind of customer. Most of my customers are women who have had clothes made for them all their lives, however young they may be. There is nothing much we could put over on them either in the matter of workmanship or fitting even if we wanted to.

There always remains the opportunity to cheat on fit and workmanship when a specialty shop deals with customers who are not experienced in buying quality in either. I have not yet sold expensive ready-made clothes, but I suspect that this affords the biggest opportunity for racketeering in the specialty shop field if you are not in business for your health.

Which leads us right into the matter of how prices are made on expensive clothes and whether or not the customers care what they pay. The base for all pricing is the prime cost of the dress plus such expenses as are directly connected with the making of the dress. That is, where one is designing and making to order, the labor of the sewing girls, the fitting, the material which goes into the dress, plus the cost of workroom supervision and the designing cost.

The wages of finishers are not high per girl, \$22.50 a 35-hour week is the base; \$25 is tops. Drapers get up to \$45 a week. The average is about 80 cents an hour. Fifty-five hours of draping, and sewing makes an average Hawes dress, and a labor cost of \$44. To this must be added a cutting and fitting charge which is about \$16.45 per dress, making a total of \$60.45 for direct labor charges.

Add the cost of material which seldom goes under \$3 a yard, although, as I have indicated it may go down to a dollar if your customer will take it. On the other hand, it goes

up to \$10 on the slightest provocation, and not infrequently up to \$20. Take \$5 per yard for the stuff of an average dress and seven-and-a-half yards as the necessary amount if the designer is Hawes and not given to saving anything. \$37.50 for material plus \$60.45 for labor gives \$97.95 for the actual dollars and cents directly spent for one given dress.

This is the prime cost, to which must be added about \$16.71 for production overhead, workroom manager's salary, stockroom costs, muslin, pins, sewing machines, and I would say \$15 for designing. This last is an estimated figure since I can only use figures from my own business. I own my business and therefore the salary I draw from it pays me not only for designing but for selling, promoting, managing, and one hundred other things which I do. If we employed a designer, she would undoubtedly get more per dress than I do. At any rate, the prime cost of \$97.95 per dress, plus designing and production overhead gives us a total direct cost for a dress of \$129.66.

To this must then be added the indirect overhead, the space which is paid for by the square foot, the salespeople who may stand idle half the time, waiting for the arrival of their special customers, the models who show clothes for six hours straight one day and read books half the days of the year, the light, the heat, the secretaries, the bookkeepers. All of these necessary adjuncts to an expensive clothing shop are idle half the year. But they cannot be put on ice. They must be paid whether there are customers or not.

The indirect overhead, divided and assigned to each dress, is apt to be a little less than one-third of the selling price. On the type dress I am using as an example, the overhead charges would be about \$59.61, making a grand total cost to Hawes of \$189.27. Our selling price on such a dress would probably be \$195.

It is quite easy to see that, where a material costs \$20 and there may be one hundred hours of labor on a dress, or, as is usually the case, on a suit, the selling price gets up to \$400 without the slightest effort. It costs plenty to carry on a craft business, an individual, special, one-at-a-time affair. In a world becoming attuned to mass production, it sounds like thievery by the time one arrives at the selling price.

As I have indicated, one can cheat on the material and the workmanship. One can also cheat up to a certain point on the final selling price. It is the rare specialty shop where the prices are absolutely set.

In shops where there is not a set price, what different women pay for made-to-order clothes varies enormously. In one shop, for instance, the saleswomen are given the lowest possible figure at which the dress may be sold. It is then the business of the saleswoman to give whatever price she sees fit to her customer. She will get a larger percentage on the sale for every dollar she gets over the low price.

I discovered all this by hiring salespeople from time to time from other shops. One of them came to me very gaily one day and said, "I just sold the blue satin dress for \$325!"

"But, it's \$275," said I.

"Mrs. Y bought all her clothes from me when I was at Zim's," she said. "She's always paid me that for clothes."

I explained that all Hawes clothes were marked in plain figures and that was the price and nobody could do anything about it. I developed such a definite policy in order to cut out the hours of dickering which usually go with selling expensive clothes to begin with. The hours it wastes cost enough to cut the prices at the outset.

What is more, it has always been a mystery to me why customers put up with the game of indefinite prices. Most of them don't know it exists to be sure, but some of them do. I've

discussed the price-switching policy of certain shops with friends of mine who know perfectly well it goes on. They just seem to think that they always get a low price.

Even where a specialty shop sells expensive ready-made clothes, prices are subject to change under pressure. Often one's saleswoman seems to be able to cut off ten or fifteen dollars on a couple of \$79.50 dresses.

This is partly because, in pricing expensive ready-made clothes, the specialty shop takes a good wallop mark-up to cover future marking-down on dresses which don't sell. It is also because some specialty shops just deliberately bank on their customers not finding out that the little navy blue print exists in a more crowded place for \$39.50 while they are selling it at \$49.50 or more.

A favorite trick of the specialty shop is very special sales. At the end of the season, the ready-made shop is always stuck with a certain amount of unsold stock which must be marked-down and cleared out. Here are bargains. To the bargains are often added cheap dresses which are bought for the sale. These are passed off on the thoughtless public as mark-downs. In reality they are fully marked-up to meet the real mark-downs in price.

My manager has taken issue with me on the matter of my trying to explain how prices are made. He says the public will never understand. But I have a method in my madness. Not only do I believe that women who buy clothes made to order are seldom cheated, but I also feel that they have every right to understand why their clothes cost what they do. I wish that women who buy expensive ready-made clothes would realize that they would get far more for their money if they bought clothes made to order.

My manager has prepared a chart which shows in figures what I have said in words. We have given the history of an

average Hawes dress on the left side. On the right side, we show the incomplete but authentic history of a ready-made dress which retails for the same price. (See page 239.)

I cannot quote the name of the manufacturer whose figures are used since he finds the comparison to Hawes figures somewhat odious. Anyone who has any reason for questioning the ready-to-wear figures may write me a personal letter and receive adequate reassurance as to their authenticity. The figures on retailers' gross profit are from the National Retail Dry Goods Association.

Since we were unable to obtain authentic figures on the exact mark-up and selling expenses of a specialty shop selling \$195 dresses, we thought better to carry our comparison only through the prime gross profit.

The chart makes one point of fundamental importance to any woman who buys expensive clothes, Hawes figures being typical of all custom-made shops. The actual labor and material which goes into our \$195 made-to-order dress is \$97.95. The actual labor and material which go into a \$195 ready-made dress, sold by a manufacturer to the retailer who resells it to the customer, is \$77.29.

Even the gross profit of Hawes Inc. is slightly under that of the retail ready-made store. The services which the average made-to-order shop gives are usually greater than those given by the ready-made specialty shop. In addition to these simple facts of life, the woman who is fortunate enough to find a designer from whom she can buy directly assures herself of the individuality of her costume. When she buys ready-made clothes, she is seldom protected. When she buys made-to-order clothes from a shop which sells French designs, she is almost certain to meet herself a dozen times a day.

I do not think that any expensive dressmakers overcharge

very much. Making-to-order is a hazardous business, full of pitfalls, extra fittings, people changing their minds and what-not. I am in full agreement with Miss Mary Lewis' principle that people make all their money on Fords. The dressmaker is pretty well held to a price by what the market will bear—and the market of rich women who spend real money for clothes will bear just about what those clothes cost to make and sell.

	HAWES CUSTOM-MADE CLOTHES		EXPENSIVE READY-TO-WEAR CLOTHES	
		<i>% to Retail Selling Price</i>		<i>% to Retail Selling Price</i>
Retail Selling Price	\$195.00	100.00%	\$195.00	100.00%
Prime Cost (material and labor)	97.95	50.23%	77.29	39.64%
Prime Gross Profit	\$97.05	49.77%	\$117.71 *	60.36%
Designing & Production Overhead	31.71	16.26%		
Gross Profit	\$65.34	33.51%		
Selling & General Expenses	59.61	30.57%		
Operating Profit	\$5.73	2.94%		
* Retailers' Gross Profit	\$70.40	36.10%		
Manufacturers' Prime Gross Profit	47.31	24.26%		
Prime Gross Profit	\$117.71	60.36%		

The most important conclusion to be drawn from the figures which I have given here is that *any* woman, whatever her income, who can scrape together enough to buy her clothes made-to-order receives more in quality of material and workmanship than the woman who buys ready-made

clothes. It is perfectly obvious that both the manufacturer and the retailer take a profit and pay certain overhead expenses from the ultimate selling price of the ready-made dress. Therefore the selling price of the ready-made dress will be relatively higher to the consumer than the selling price of a dress which is made and sold by the same firm.

I wanted to insert a chart for the benefit of the women who can neither buy custom-made clothes from a couturière or expensive clothes from a ready-made or made-to-order specialty shop. We were unable to get accurate figures. On the basis of general store figures for department stores which sell dresses at \$15.75 to \$29.50, plus figures which we could obtain from manufacturers who make those clothes, it appears that the \$29.50 dress contains more labor and material in proportion to its retail price than the ready-made dress which sells for \$195. However, the \$29.50 dress contains less labor and material, in relation to its retail price, than the Hawes dress.

The cheap wholesaler gets his profits by selling a very large volume, multiplying his 50-cent profit over and over again. The specialty shop profits by its large mark-up where it is run well and doesn't have to do too much marking-down. The couturière profits chiefly in the satisfaction of being able to eat while she has the pleasure of dressing stylish ladies in beautiful clothes.

I do not mean to suggest that I, Elizabeth Hawes, can never make a great deal of money some year in my business. When times are prosperous and women spending freely, they triple their orders and the overhead does not go up very much. But I had better save what I make that year, because come a bad season and orders are cut while the overhead goes on just the same.

Oh, I fully understand why Mr. Kraemer wouldn't take

a couturière for a gift. About specialty shops which sell ready-made, I think he is partially mistaken. I once saw a big New York specialty shop's statement for 1929. The owner did made-to-order and ready-made retail, and also had a wholesale business.

To begin with, she had crossed off something like \$100,000 in bad debts as a total loss. But she showed a good deal more than that in net profit. Most of it later evaporated in the stock market, but that wasn't the fault of the clothing business.

Such has not yet been my fate, either the beginning or the end of it. I set up certain policies, but all to do with designing and dressmaking, that treacherous business. The policies included selling as I outlined it in the beginning of Hawes-Harden, as far as I was able to get good salespeople.

One of our rules is, "Always be polite to customers." Sounds silly? It is not at all a rule of most expensive shops. Indeed, a young lady from a competitor's shop said to me lately, "Oh, we are *always* rude to our customers." I didn't hire her.

Sometimes we just have to tell people we don't have what they want. That passes for being rude when they don't realize that I paid \$22,000 one year for the privilege of getting to be a couturière in New York. I reserve the right to refuse to put a diamond button on a dress one season and stick diamond buttons all over a dress the next season if I want to.

Even now people come in and express surprise that there are no French models and seem rather insulted about it. They can get them any place, we say.

"Haven't you got a single puffed sleeve?" They'll say one season.

"They're all over the place," we say.

"Haven't you got any sharkskin?" they say.

"We don't use artificial silk," we say.

"I don't want to wear my dresses short," they say.

"Fine," we respond, "We'll make you some long ones."

"Take all the fullness out of this skirt," they say.

"Ok," we say, "but you'll feel awfully silly in it next year."

"What do I care about next year?" they answer.

"Any dress which isn't in style for at least three years isn't any good to begin with," we say.

"I have all the clothes you've made me for the last three years," they say. "I don't need any this season."

"Wonderful," we say, "That's the biggest compliment we could have."

"I want the black dress that Mrs. Young bought," they say.

Then we have to call up Mrs. Young and see if she minds. If she minds, we lose the other sale. That's just one of my personal idiocyncracies.

Soon when they ask for what we haven't got, we'll be able to say, "That's the kind of clothes that Mark makes. Why don't you go there?" Soon, depressions permitting, there will be many couturiers in New York, designing their versions of style, each making clothes for his group of women.

Muriel King makes her kind of clothes. Valentina makes her kind of clothes. Hawes makes her kind of clothes. There'll be an American couture one day, for the made-to-order lady.

In case anyone should be under any illusions at this point concerning what kind of clothes I think the couture of any country should furnish its clients, I print below a letter which Patricia Collinge wrote me about a dress.

Dear Liz:

About four years ago I went into your establishment to buy a hat. That's all I wanted and if I had minded my own business, that's all I would have got. But I had to go snooping and what happened? Blue Mazurka, that's what happened. It was the loveliest dress I ever saw in my life and it still is, Elizabeth, and that is what seems to be the trouble. Because after all, that was four years ago, and I ought to be through with it by now, oughtn't I? But it hangs together, darling. It definitely stays put, and it's wearing me down. It's wearing me and I'm wearing it, and there you are. And don't give me any back talk about giving it away because you just don't know. You see, my husband likes it. So I needn't go on with that. I like it, too. But not all the time.

The first two years were fine. I loved the dress. I used to think up places to go where I wasn't even invited just so I could wear it. And the third year wasn't so bad, though the reason I was late for so many dinner parties, if anyone cares, was because Jim would catch me in some little number I had bought for relief and I would have to take it off at the last moment and put on Blue Mazurka. He said I looked right in it. And I felt right in it, too. A little nauseated maybe, but right. And then I had my tonsils out, and that gave me a rest.

But the fourth year got me. It wasn't that I didn't try. I would buy something else and put it on and Jim would say, "Aren't you going to wear Blue Mazurka" and I would scream. Then it got so I couldn't buy anything else. I would go into simple, defenseless shops and try on dress after dress and Blue Mazurka would materialize in the mirror and I would say thank you very much but I have a dress and walk out. Then I thought of setting fire to Blue Mazurka, and then I would think of what Jim would say and then I would think of setting fire to Jim. Then I tried not wearing evening dress at all but that only got me pointed at, and then I tried staying home, but I would find myself in the closet staring at Blue Mazurka and muttering, and I knew no good would come of that.

Then I tried going to Europe and leaving Blue Mazurka behind, but at the last minute Jim walked in and looked in my

closet and said, "You're not going without that are you?" So I took it to Europe.

And now I'm back and so is Blue Mazurka, and even the sea fogs haven't hurt it. Just freshened it up, really. It's as bright as a dollar, and I can't stand it. I'm not the woman I was, and four years is enough.

So will you do something for me? Will you take it back and keep it somewhere and will you look at it sometimes and think of me and see if you can't do something about making clothes that won't wear quite so passionately and will go just a little out of style. Because there can be reason in everything and even the War lasted only four years.

But at least don't make any more clothes like Blue Mazurka, and if you do, don't let me buy them. Because I know what's going to happen; I'll be coming back for more. Because don't misunderstand, I like them. I like them very, very much. Hawes clothes, forever in fact, and believe me, Elizabeth, forever is right.

Lovingly,
PAT COLLINGE

Miss Collinge was only on her second year of the Blue Mazurka when Mr. Nibs helped me to purchase my ivory tower. While he was doing that, he was teaching me a lot of things about the fate of the ready-made lady.



WHILE we were moving into, decorating, policy-fixing up on 67th Street, my inexpensive clothes were busy going out all over the U.S.A. from N. H. Nibs.

I cared about those clothes. I cared so much that I got Lord and Taylor to let me write my own ad when they first

showed them. It appeared on a full page of a New York paper, the end of August 1933. It was surrounded by sketches of Hawes clothes for \$15.75 and \$29.50. I was proud of the clothes. My copy went like this:

“*Skol* . . . This is a respectful dedication of my first real collection of ready-made clothes to a number of delightful people who have never been able to afford my custom-made prices . . . but have kept on wishing they could. I finally routed myself out of 67th Street for a spell . . . and over to Seventh Ave. to see what could be done with all those machines. I had a couple of knits run up for sweaters, invented a wooly silk, twisted up a skein of yarn . . . and prayed. And I say, it’s a miracle how clothes can be sewed up (and not in sweat shops) out of materials which please even my spoiled tastes (I’m used to paying \$10 a yard) . . . and sell for \$22.50 (up and down) . . . and be really good clothes. These clothes are not intended for the whole female population. They’re for those special people who wail aloud in a world of diamond buttons for a good solid brass shoe hook . . . who prefer an innocent twist of yarn to a satin bow . . . who may want to be different but know that all good clothes are classic. These clothes are for the year of our Lord 1933 . . . for college . . . football games . . . shopping . . . working. I’ve designed a couple of bags which aren’t just old leather envelopes. If you don’t like the Hawser scarf and cap, you’re just not the Hawes type and can relax about the whole business! So have fun . . .

(signed) ELIZABETH HAWES

I meant that copy. I was excited by mass production. The models looked attractive and I thought to myself that many of my most particular custom-made clients would have been glad to wear them.

I ordered a few for myself. The jersey two-piece things were very comfortable. The skirt had to sit in my waistline and there was enough stretch in the back and sleeves to take care of driving the car. The silk dresses caught me in odd

places, although they looked as if they fit. I had the sleeves taken out at Hawes Inc., but there wasn't enough material across the back to ever get them in right.

The sight of twenty identical Hawes models hanging on a rack when the stock began to come in for the orders upset me a little. But I hastily reflected that most of the women who bought them would never meet.

More upsetting was the fact that the color combinations began to go sour almost immediately. There was a brown and *blue-green* knit in the collection which came in, hundreds strong, in brown and *yellow-green*. I went to apprise Mr. Nibs of this dreadful fact.

He said the buyers never noticed those things and I shouldn't worry. I said it was hideous, whether the buyers noticed it or not. He told me to relax.

This sort of thing continued unabated and apparently the buyers did not notice. They didn't even notice if Mr. Nibs ran out of one material and was forced to substitute another. Sometimes I wonder whether or not, in spite of the fact that Mr. Nibs and the buyers were really too busy to care about a color combination being distinctly off, the public didn't consciously or unconsciously react by not buying.

Some months later when the buyer was marking down those brown and *yellow-green* knits, she could hardly be expected to remember that they bore little or no resemblance to the model from which she had ordered. She probably just said, "Damn the public. They always used to buy brown and green."

There seems to be a decided tendency in the world of mass produced clothes to blame everything on the public. There was, for instance, that insignificant little matter of whether or not the clothes *fit* the public. It always seemed to me that Mr. Nibs, or maybe it was Mr. Meyer, had a definite

idea, conceived eighteen years ago, of just how women wanted to feel in their clothes.

First, as I have already said, all the clothes were too tight across the back, too tight by my standards. It is perfectly possible that in the past women liked their dresses tight across the back. I know that it used to be the thing to fit sleeves into very tight armholes. Some of the older women whom I dress prefer their sleeves fitted that way.

However, the younger generation drives cars, types, throws balls, and is otherwise active in its clothes. I pointed out all this to Mr. Nibs but we never did see eye to eye on the matter. Mr. Meyer had been using the same patterns for years and saw no reason for change.

I had an uneasy feeling that if I had pressed the point to the extent of making a real row or threatening to leave they would just tell me, as they often did, that I was accustomed to dealing with a very specialized clientele. "Oh, the women *you* dress . . . ,” they'd say. Well, the women I dress are made just like other women. There's one thing they're very stubborn about. They want to be able to move easily in their clothes.

I finally got rumors from interested friends that the Nibs-Hawes clothes did not fit when they tried them on in stores. I hied me into Lord and Taylor and got the assistant buyer. When I asked her about it, she said, "All the clothes are nearly a size too big. We just pay no attention to the marked size but see to it that the customer is fitted."

She seemed quite unperturbed. Lord and Taylor have a relatively intelligent type of buyer and salesgirl. In the Middle West, I suppose the salesgirls tried to sell size twelve Nibs-Hawes dresses to size twelve customers and everything looked very odd indeed.

I took up the matter of the fit of the clothes regularly

once a week, thinking that possibly the steady drip of the idea would finally penetrate and bring action. When I left Nibs, after a year, the last thing I did was to mention that the clothes didn't fit. A year later, I called upon him, being in the neighborhood, and said it was a pity the clothes hadn't fitted. He had still "been in business for eighteen years."

Three years after I left him, I saw him again and he made a very odd remark. He didn't attach it to anything but he must have seen that "fit" look coming over my face. He said, "You know, Mr. Meyer has left. You know, Mr. Meyer cost me thousands of dollars."

There are ways to save a part of the thousands of dollars which go out the windows of the Seventh Avenue skyscrapers. A small example again brings up the matter of knits.

The knitted clothes—they were knitted blouses worn with woven wool skirts—which I designed for Nibs sold very well. The knitted material of which the blouses were made came from a number of places. There was one very nice young man who worked with me and made up several things according to my ideas of weave and color. He went to a lot of trouble about it and I was awfully glad when I saw the material selling.

One day, a month or so after we had started delivering orders, the young man called on me and said, "What happened to that striped knit I made up from your design? It was never re-ordered."

"What?" I asked. "Why that sold. I know it did."

"Mr. Nibs," I found him after the boy had left. "How did it happen McGowan never got an order on the striped knit? That sold very well, I thought."

Mr. Nibs looked at me and blinked a little. Mr. Nibs, incidentally, was a highly esteemed member of the organ-

ization which Joe Rosenthal had formed to stop copying. The copying which they stopped was exclusively limited to the dresses which they manufactured. Let the fabric manufacturers and the French look after themselves.

Mr. Nibs, at the moment I asked about the knit, looked slightly like a small boy caught in a neighbor's apple orchard. "Isn't that one of the knits you designed?" He asked.

"Yes, but so what?"

"Why, I got Seldun to make that up at a better price. Of course, if it had been a design you'd picked out of McGowan's line, I wouldn't have done it."

I never argued with Mr. Nibs about that. McGowan had spent some time and money making my original idea into a knit. Someone else could copy it cheaper—on the other side of the river in an old loft in Hoboken. I'd been there. Seldun couldn't work out a new design for me, but he could copy anything.

I suppose the difference in price between the original McGowan knit and Seldun's copy paid for a few of the dresses which finally got sent back to Nibs because they didn't fit. A lot of the rest of them were paid for by artificial silk.

Mr. Nibs and I had an ever recurring battle about artificial silk. I don't object to artificial silk on principle. I object to it because one never can tell what's going to happen to it. Sometimes it wears. Sometimes it stretches. Sometimes it shrinks. Sometimes it cleans and often it washes.

One year I made a dress of artificial silk in Hawes Inc. We sold seven of them at about \$145. I took back seven of them. The material went into ribbons when it was cleaned. The manufacturers say it cleans if you know what you are doing. Unfortunately, even if one handed out a pedigree with every dress, many cleaners still wouldn't know what to do

about it. The pedigree would be lost. Somebody would hopefully wash your artificial silk dress.

All in all, I consider it a most undependable fabric, whether it's rayon or acetate. The public doesn't understand what it is. Why do the manufacturers keep their customers in such a fog about the whole thing? If you asked ten ordinary customers, "What is Viscose? What is Celanese? What is American Enka Yarn? you would get the answer, "Oh, they're all a kind of silk."

They are trade names for artificial silk. Some of them are made of rayon, some of acetate, the two divisions of that family. I understand that there is an artificial silk in existence which wears forever. I do not doubt it. It is not on the market.

Nearly half of the dress advertisements in the *New Yorker* and in Fashion magazines are showing artificial silk dresses. They appear to be ads for the merchandise of large department stores. They bear a little asterisk after some trade name which refers you down to a small sentence: "Celanese . . .* Reg. U.S. Pat. Off." "Salyna . . .* Spun rayon and cotton."

Nobody has ever seen fit to try very hard to tell the public about artificial silk: that it is a by-product of munitions; that it comes in many grades, some of which wear, others of which do not; that one of your artificial silk dresses may last forever and another fall apart at the first cleaning or shrink to nothing at the first washing; that the artificial silk companies are very rich.

They are so rich that they pay for the store advertising which bears the trade names of their products in many cases. They are so rich and they do so much advertising that practically no fashion writer would dare to question their prod-

uct's quality. No magazine or newspaper could afford to risk losing that much advertising.

They are so rich that they employ Fashion for large sums to make new weaves for them, design pretty clothes in their material, help them tell the world that it is chic to wear their fabrics, help them get the public so bawled up it doesn't know whether it's all silk and a yard wide or all artificial silk and liable to shrink to twenty-seven inches.

My conversations with fabric manufacturers since I decided to use absolutely no artificial silk in Hawes Inc. are very revealing. One year they said that only artificial silk could be made dull and that all chic fabrics were dull. That was the year that if you spilled a drop of water on the dullness of your artificial silk, it left an irremovable spot. The next year, the fabric did not spot. It was also being made in all real silk.

Another year they said that only artificial silk could have the requisite shine to be chic. Even when you showed them the requisite shine on real silk, they shook their heads and just looked away and said, "It isn't the same."

Finally I decided that I would use artificial silk in Hawes Inc. if any manufacturer would guarantee me not only the price of the material in the dress if it went wrong, but also the price of the labor. Hawes Inc. takes back dresses which go wrong for any reason which is conceivably our fault. I feel that if the fabric which I have chosen for the dress will not clean or shrinks while hanging in the closet, it is my fault.

I have not, in four years, been able to find a manufacturer who would completely guarantee me any piece of artificial silk. I have found a number of manufacturers who, in the privacy of my office, tell me, "Well, I think you're

right. You make such expensive clothes. They really should wear. Although I shouldn't think it was good business."

One day this fall a very minor salesman who had been selling silks for various companies for years tipped the whole matter off. He looked very solemn as he told me about the old days when you just sold plain silk, all real silk. It wore. It didn't change every season in weave. Business was stable. He didn't know what the world was coming to now. Nobody cared about quality anymore. "I always say, Miss Hawes, there ought to be *some* difference between cheap clothes and expensive ones."

I, myself, think that if you pay \$3.75 for a dress, you might possibly expect it to wear only for a short time. Even that isn't necessary, however. There's always that old friend of the family, cotton. It's cheap enough. Everybody in the United States has had a silk dress by now.

At any rate, the idea is that everyone wants silk and that practically everyone gets artificial silk and maybe it's satisfactory and maybe it isn't. My quarrel with Mr. Nibs was on that point.

There was a certain artificial silk, a good name for one of them would be Notatal silk, which cost \$1 a yard and of which Mr. Nibs was very fond. It was supposed to be washable. It wasn't. I found some pure silk for \$1.15 a yard which would wash and, although it didn't have the weight of the Notatal silk, it was really nice material.

Hastening to Mr. Nibs, I said, "Look, here's some pure silk for only \$1.15 a yard. It will really wash. Can't we substitute it for Notatal?"

Mr. Nibs was quite irritated with me. We'd been carrying on this battle for several months. I had spent considerable time locating my cheap pure silk. "Miss Hawes," he said, "will you listen to me? Last year I sold twenty-five

thousand dresses in Notatal silk. Only five hundred of them came back. It is not profitable for me to pay the extra fifteen cents a yard."

Knowing American women as I do, the middle class who pay \$15.75 for most of their dresses, I was able to complete the story of Notatal silk. It did not wash. Twenty-five thousand women had washed it. Twenty-four thousand five hundred of them had then thrown out the dress. Five hundred of them had returned it to the store from which it came and gotten their money back.

You see, the store won't fuss too much if you're right because the store throws it back on the manufacturer. If Mr. Nibs still made a profit after refunding the money for five hundred dresses, what difference did it make to him what happened to the other twenty-four thousand five hundred? Running any business is just figuring out what the traffic will bear. American women bear a lot.

Of course, at the same time that Mr. Nibs was thriftily saving his fifteen cents, Mr. Meyer was quietly and well-meaningly, according to Mr. Nibs' later confession, losing thousands of dollars one way or another. The salesmen were spending some more giving presents to buyers and taking them to dinner, while my manager and I were frothing at the mouth over it and getting the buyers to come in by a few direct talks.

Mr. Nibs was constantly reiterating his two pet ideas. He had been in business for eighteen years and nobody was in business for his health. And I was paving the way for teaching myself a big lesson.

Mr. Nibs used to try from time to time to suggest little things to me about designing wholesale clothes but he never could give any logical reasons for his ideas. For instance, I made dresses without belts, just fitted in at the waist.

Mr. Nibs said that all wholesale dresses had belts. He was big enough to give in, however, when I asked him *why* and he found he didn't know.

To my surprise, after we had delivered numberless dresses without belts, buyers began to write in and ask to have belts sent along. Mr. Nibs was very triumphant about this but still he could give no reason. I saw that there must be more to this problem that met the eye of a custom-made dressmaker.

I went to visit the den of another wholesaler I knew, one who made evening dresses. He let me look at his line because I worked in a sportwear house so he knew I wouldn't copy anything. I saw innumerable dresses without belts.

"Do you make dresses without belts?" I said, hopefully.

"Oh, we show them without belts," he said. "They are designed to be worn without a belt. But we never deliver a dress without a belt. They can't be sold. Don't fit."

A great light burst upon me. It was not as Mr. Nibs insinuated, that the public were fanatical on the matter of belts. The public merely wanted to give a semblance of fit to itself about the waist. As no two size twelve women have the same waist measure, the simple way out of the whole difficulty is to hitch in the extra inches with a belt.

I was glad to find that there was a manufacturer who had figured out the answer. I have always felt a little less despair about Seventh Avenue since that historic day. Of course the same gentleman immediately asked me whether I thought stiff materials were going to go over next season and how I felt about lace.

I always say that some women like stiff materials and always will and other women just like soft ones. About lace, it packs well and is flattering so why quibble? This is not the type of answer that goes over well in the world of fashion.

It ought to be clear that even when I was in doubt about the wisdom of making something for Nibs, I couldn't consult him about it. Anyway, I thought at that time I knew how long it took a style to get from the Duchess of Windsor to Rosie O'Grady. I was just confusing style, a really new cut, with a red lobster painted onto any old dress.

So came my downfall. In November, I made Nibs an early spring line, known to the trade as "Palm Beach." I had been designing and selling clothes with fullness in the front of the skirt for a year at 56th Street. I concluded I could put it on Seventh Avenue.

Mr. Meyer didn't quarrel with me since he still thought I might not be insane. Mr. Nibs was still leaving me alone. The first line had sold. I finished up the Palm Beach clothes and flew onto a freight boat to tour the Caribbean, rest, and design the spring clothes for Hawes Inc.

After I left, when the line was shown to the sales force, a riot broke out. "We can't sell this stuff," they said. "Who in the name of God wants front fullness?"

My manager did the best he could to calm them. Luckily for me, before I got back, the cables had come across from the Paris openings. Schiaparelli was showing front fullness. The sales force was reassured but nervous.

Schiaparelli was probably showing front fullness for the third season too. It was undoubtedly the first season she felt sure enough of it to put in a lot of models which weren't tight on the tummy. So it was the first season anyone in the trade noticed it.

The sales force should have been nervous because the buyers said it was too new. It was the first season they'd heard of it. They didn't know whether the public would like it.

Just to reassure the buyers, the sales force would employ that sales technique of turning pale with fright whenever a

bit of front fullness came out the door of the model room. They would look at the buyer out of the corner of their eyes and say, "Errr . . . it's new, isn't it? Umm . . . they say Schiaparelli is showing it. What do you think of it?"

This after a long careful explanation on my part that all they had to do about the front fullness was tell the buyers that I had been making and selling it for a year up-town very successfully; that I was therefore quite sure the public liked it, that, if they insisted, Schiaparelli was showing it also. And so why not try some?

No, it is not the Seventh Avenue technique to do what it feels right and stand by it. Naturally the buyers turn down anything new which is terrifying even those who are trying to sell it.

The buyers have no money for experimenting. The only two stores in the United States which did anything with those clothes were The Emporium in San Francisco and Lord and Taylor in New York.

All the clothes sold fairly well in Lord and Taylor. They sold in The Emporium in San Francisco because there just happened to be a girl in the advertising department who understood exactly what I meant when I made them.

She explained, gaily and lightly, about Hawes clothes. She said, as I did, that they weren't for everyone. She got them segregated so that the people who wanted them didn't have to go through eight hundred fancier ones. She used light wash line sketches to show them in the papers. She managed to notify the proper clientele that the clothes existed, just as I had in the *New Yorker* for Hawes Inc.

Most of the other stores who bought the clothes advertised them in a routine way. They mixed them all up among dresses with bows and satin ribbons. They didn't notify the public that they had very simple clothes with practically no

trimming for \$18.95. In 1933, inexpensive dresses, much more than today, were loaded up with trimming.

It was almost routine for a woman who wanted something simple to save up her money until she could pay at least \$39.50. She didn't dream that what she wanted existed for a lower price. It didn't often. It still usually doesn't.

No woman is under the illusion, I am sure, that she can get what is known to the trade as "high style" under \$89.50.

Front fullness was "high style" in 1933. That means you could sell it for \$175 and maybe for \$89.50 but you couldn't sell it for \$15.75 because these buyers wouldn't take a chance on it.

Life at Nibs became increasingly difficult beginning with my front fullness. Nobody believed anything I said after that. Front fullness did not come in for another two years at \$10.75. My timing, alas, was wrong. I was not, as I had expected I would be, proving a boon to N. H. Nibs just then.

I had thought it took about a year from the beginning of a new cut in clothes for it to descend to \$10.75. It takes at least two and a half if not three years. This has nothing whatever to do with the taste of the masses. The inexpensive public is definitely not involved. The couturier, her customers, the manufacturer, and the department store buyer figure it out for themselves.

It takes the couturier a year to be sure that enough women want something new like full skirts. The buyers don't pay any attention to her try-outs. The first year that they see a great many full skirts, they say, "Oh," and only Bergdorf Goodman and the expensive specialty shops buy them.

The next season, a few expensive manufacturers buy a few full skirts and show them with great fear. "How do you like it?" they ask the buyers in New York. "Do you think they will be good?"

The next season, since everything in Paris has a full skirt and has had for a whole year, and Bergdorf has been selling them most of that time, the cheap manufacturer says to the buyer, "Better get some of those full skirts. Paris is full of them."

The buyer has seen them pictured in *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. She may have seen a few on the street, or would have if she ever had time to go on the street. She buys them.

The public is apprised that something new and wonderful has appeared: the full skirt. At least two years have elapsed since the women who could afford couturier prices have been able to supply themselves with full skirts. The general public, by the grace of Seventh Avenue and the buyers, can now have full skirts.

There are times, as I have suggested, when something creeps into style over a two-year period without the manufacturers even suspecting it. These are the revolutions in American style.

After I had shown myself up as a high-stylist instead of a miracle girl, Mr. Nibs began to have long serious talks with me about my attitude toward life. "You can be a great success down here if you will apply yourself," he'd tell me.

"Why don't you put in just a few things each season with the coming line so the buyers will get used to them and buy them the next season?" I'd ask.

"We are not in business to experiment," he answered, "but you will make a great deal of money here if you will play along."

"Play along with artificial silk, I suppose," I'd answer sourly.

I'd fling myself back to 67th Street in a taxi and think up a couple of new tennis dresses for the summer line. But Mr. Meyer was always too quick for me by that time.

Mr. Meyer just took to making up models again. He never had time to bother with my ideas after front fullness. He was always filling in the line with some new number he'd gotten by sketch from some vendor of new ideas.

I wasn't distressed by that. I could probably have learned the proper timing and brought things down from Hawes Inc. two years after I'd first sold them there.

I realized, as Mr. Nibs assured me, that we couldn't make over the buyers and department stores in the United States in a few minutes. The public was in the habit of waiting for new style. And new style can always wait.

My deep-dyed despair was due to the fact that Hawes clothes were being put out in bad material that wouldn't wear and this was not necessary even at \$15.75. What is more, they didn't fit even that little bit that present-day mass-production clothes can fit.

As despair deepened and Mr. Nibs tried to tell me what to design, I took to brandy at lunch to dull myself for the ordeal of afternoons on Seventh Avenue.

I reflected on the Great American Design movement, so blithely begun by Lord and Taylor in 1932. Now it was the spring of 1934 and one heard comparatively little of the American Designers.

A good many people had originally insisted that there weren't any. Then, because Lord and Taylor told them and other stores promoted, because dozens of articles were written on American Designers, everyone became convinced there must be some somewhere. And, in fact, myriads of people turned into American Designers who had never been seen before and have never been heard of since.

What had become of that widely hailed "means of stimulating business" in the dress industry? I'll tell you what became of it. It simply wasn't profitable. We were a promotion

which was dropped because, after a while, either you must show a profit or go the way of all flesh.

This is okay. Nobody objects to the bare facts. The objectionable feature was that we American Designers were promoted ahead of our time. We were not chosen because we could sell well at \$15.75. Most of us had never even seen a machine. We were chosen to stimulate business. Most of us didn't stimulate it more than a few weeks.

I should think the whole American Design movement was set back several years by being promoted right out of grammar school into the world.

Dorothy Shaver, the vice-president of Lord and Taylor, certainly hoped we were ready in 1932. She's batted her head against many a stone wall and many a merchandise man to put across things the public might want. Sometimes, like other people, she's ahead of her time. If the merchandising men weren't always on hand with their nasty little figures, perhaps the stores could do a little more unprofitable experimenting for the public weal. She'll pick up American Designers again when there are more to pick up. Her merchandising men may not be in much of a hurry.

The American Design movement had to fall on its face in 1932. There just weren't enough trained designers. The designers will learn, finally. They will graduate more quickly from their infancy if the stores and manufacturers stop throwing France in their faces and will let them use the background God gave them. The designers will find out what the public wants if the stores will stop concentrating on promotions for a while and begin to worry about the specific needs of their clientele.

The American Designers will come along, of course, no matter who inadvertently tries to kill them. But if they're encouraged, given credit when they're good, allowed to ex-

periment, they'll come along much faster. Of course, as everyone knows, experimenting costs money. "Please, Miss Hawes. You talk like an artist. We are not in business for our health."

"So I begin to see," I said to Seventh Avenue, "but I am, and to hell with you. I'll find some way of keeping in business which doesn't drive me to drink."

So I retired to my ivory tower to cogitate about mass production—and how to pay the rent.



I SAID very clearly to myself what I thought of Seventh Avenue but I didn't want to be convinced. One reason was that I needed very badly to earn money outside to pay for 67th Street. The other reason was that I'd just begun to suspect what mass production of clothes might mean.

What the mass production of clothes did mean ninety-nine times out of a hundred was reinforced in my mind, after I resigned from Nibs in April of 1934, by Marshall Field and Co. They wanted to push off a new wholesale dress business and hired me to come to Chicago for a working week and do six models. I went—for \$1,000 clear profit which I needed. I was not hopeful.

The head of that dress business was not tall or worried like Mr. Nibs. He was small, but he was strong and tough. He wanted dresses to retail for \$10.95 and that was that. Quality was necessarily secondary and also style if it meant more than 25 cents' worth of trimming.

I spent most of the time I was in Chicago having my picture taken and being interviewed and taken to lunch with executives and fashion writers. That was why I was being paid. The clothes were not important. They could find some designs somewhere. I got six about finished between photographers and came back home.

One of my stipulations in working for them had been that the clothes were not to be sold with my name except where I consented. That made no difference to the new dress business head. My agreement was only oral anyway. They not only sold my name to a store in New York by whom I didn't care to be advertised, but the advertised dresses looked so different from my original conception that I was personally unable to recognize them as my designs.

It is almost impossible for me to get into print what I feel when I look at a dress which is obviously made of a material that you could shoot peas through, that has no shape of any kind, but just a belt around the waist so the customer can pretend it fits there, the whole topped by some disgusting trimming which has been added without reference to the line of the dress, which doesn't exist in any case.

My soul curdles. My stomach turns over eight times per second. My spine tightens and I vomit mentally. I don't mind seeing people in those clothes because I know that most of the time it's all they can get for their price. I mind seeing advertisements for those atrocities and that's what I saw in the ad of one of New York's largest stores, one fine day, with my name attached to it.

"That'll be about all of that, Hawes," I said to myself. "You got your blood money and I hope it was worth it to you. In the future there will be no more wholesale clothes for you until such a time as you, personally, yourself, can see to it that they turn out entirely and absolutely beautiful, durable, and functional."

At the same time I made the dress arrangements with Marshall Field, I talked them into letting me have a try at really doing fabrics for them. I don't hold the dress affair much against Marshall Field and Co. The gentleman with whom I had most of my dealings, the head of all their wholesale businesses, was an extremely nice man.

Every time he said, "Design a dress," I said yes, if I can do fabrics. The cotton fabrics I'd helped them promote had been merely by means of my dress designs. I wanted to get at the actual material.

Moreover once I thought that the American fabric manufacturers would one day use me as the French fabric manufacturers use the French couturiers. Eventually the event may come to pass. Perhaps one day some American Bianchini will get together with some American Rodier or Ducharne and they will begin to back an American couture.

At the moment, as I discovered, it is not necessary for American fabric manufacturers to back me or any of the American retail designers. This is not for the reason indicated by Mr. Kraemer. Whatever kind of fools we may be,

our foolishness will not see us through the next major depression without help.

I think that by the time that depression starts, there will undoubtedly be an American couture to be backed. At the moment, there is not. However, our mere existence will not get us our backing, but economic necessity. Not our economic necessity, but that of the American fabric manufacturers.

Just at the moment, and for many years back, the American fabric manufacturers have a free source of design, a free try-out for fabrics, a free publicity agency. The arrangements of the French manufacturers with the French couturiers serve to supply all of these things to American manufacturers. The American fabric man just sits and waits to see what is going to prove good in France. Then he gets himself a little piece of it and copies.

The system of selling American fabrics on Seventh Avenue is very simple. A salesman comes in and opens his brief case. "Here is a material," he says, "that you will want to buy. It is a copy of something which Molyneux used this season. It is \$2.35 a yard. Of course, it is expensive but it is pure silk. It's exactly like the French import."

When it first began to happen to me, I used to nearly jump out of my skin with rage. "It's nothing to me what Molyneux uses," I'd snap. "Besides that, what business have you got copying it?"

The smarter Seventh Avenue fabric salesmen got so they didn't tell me what they were showing me, but that didn't make any difference. I had always seen, or bought, and used the French fabrics. I'd recognize the copies of them, one after the other, sometimes almost as quickly as I'd seen them uptown, more often a few months later.

I am now just sitting and quietly waiting for the day

when the source of fabric design from France will be cut off. It will be a sad day for France, and for the world, because when it happens, Flanders Field will be populated with freshly dead men again. The French will be fighting the Germans or the English or themselves. And eventually we will be in it too.

Before we get into it, the American fabric manufacturers will be having good business. They will be needing someone to tell them what to make next. They'll be coming around for little confabs with American designers who know whether they want soft materials, or stiff ones, whether it should be dull or shiny, rough or smooth.

They have little confabs with me from time to time now. Sometimes it's free, sometimes I get paid. Usually it's free because I can't help them now as much as the French can—and they get it free anyway.

Marshall Field paid me for learning how little use I could be to a fabric manufacturer who must immediately sell millions and millions of yards of each thing. Marshall Field is not just a department store in Chicago. Marshall Field is an enormous organization of manufacturers who sell to each other and to the Field retail store and other retail stores.

One day in May 1934, after I had quit N. H. Nibs, I gathered together my thoughts on summer materials and set out on a train for Carolina and the fabric mills of Marshall Field. The ideas were not for that summer, but for the next summer, fourteen long months away.

It takes an endless amount of time to get the first small hand-woven samples of a fabric. Some of the hand-woven samples are then selected to be made by machine. Finally the machine samples are completed. Corrections and reconstruction are suggested. Ultimately the sample pieces are

completed, and must be shown early in February for the next summer's clothes.

I had a very nice time in Carolina. I went down with a couple of men from the Field Fabric office. There was to be a meeting to discuss fabrics from many angles.

We were met by a car which motored us miles to a couple of small towns. Marshall Field mill towns. I was taken through the mills to keep me amused and presently we drove away to our final destination, a lodge high on the hill above one of the towns. It was long and low and rambling, brown, shingled and thoroughly comfortable. The view was lovely. Away down in the valley were the mills, scarcely visible through the trees. Across the valley were the mountains of Virginia.

A meeting began. Those present being the heads of the mills, the gentlemen with whom I had traveled down, and myself. There was some burning problem which couldn't be kept down. We started to talk about fabrics but soon the discussion was off into a bout between the Field mill heads and the gentleman who bought goods from them for Marshall Field in Chicago.

I stayed in the room as long as I thought permissible and garnered some interesting information. The mills sold to Marshall Field retail store at a discount, a lower price than they sold other retailers. Therefore, it was not profitable for the Marshall Field mills to sell to the Marshall Field store. Therefore the quarrel: the buyer for the store just ordered and ordered but he never got any material delivered to him. The mill heads were supposed to run their mills at a profit for the owners, and it was not profitable for them to sell to the store the owners also owned.

It all appealed to me as one of the more amusing angles on crisis in big industry. I spent two days in Carolina on

a \$200 a day rate and most of the time I was out of the conferences because they were none of my business.

I spent about an hour explaining my ideas to the assembled multitude, telling them what I thought would be good for next summer on the basis of what I had used and was using and would want to use. They were polite and even interested. But they had only one answer to everything.

"We can't go into production on anything we aren't sure we're going to sell a million yards of."

I saw them deciding what they would go into production on. They kept showing me little swatches of material which I'd seen before for, let us say, \$1.50 a yard. "How do you like that?" they'd ask.

"It's okay, but it's already in existence," I answer.

"We can put it out for \$1.00 a yard," they'd say, and put it in the pile for sample making.

I didn't have any samples for them to copy. I had a lot of samples to explain that here was a certain rough yarn in this silk which, if it could be duplicated in cotton, should give a texture such as would probably be desirable for that summer fourteen months away. Of course, the silk was too thin, the cotton weave should be tighter, and so on.

I gave them all my samples and thoughts in written form. I came home to New York.

Some months later, one of them showed up with some samples. I couldn't recognize any one of my ideas but there among the samples was an exact copy of a silk sample which I'd taken along because the twist in the yarn was new and would produce something different by way of texture however it was woven. I had my usual moment of horror at seeing a copy, intensified this time by thinking I was inadvertently responsible.

Very quickly, the gentleman said, "Oh, we aren't going

to put that in the line. I know we told you we wouldn't copy anything you brought. I don't know why they made it."

I don't think they did put it in the line. They probably found they couldn't produce it for a dollar.

Anyway, it all came to nothing except that I saw I was no good to them. I wanted them to make sample pieces and let me use them for a season after which time, I would *know* whether the fabric was right or wrong, whether it wore, whether the customers liked the way it felt and hung.

This is the step between the first sample piece of a fabric and the weaving of thousands of yards of the fabric. This trial period is carried on in France for the French fabric manufacturer by the Parisian couturiers to the small extent that is necessary in a country which does its mass production for export only.

The trial period for most fabrics manufactured in America is carried on by the French fabric manufacturer and the French couturier at no expense to the American manufacturer. The American fabric manufacturer scarcely recognizes the necessity of a trial on a fabric. He does not understand it. He accepts a successful French fabric as a fait accompli, ready for him to copy in millions of colors and millions of yards. If you talk to American fabric manufacturers about trying out fabric they are either bored or horrified at the slowness of procedure, the necessity for making those few yards.

Never will I forget, long ago, 1930 or 1931, the scandalized face of an American gentleman who asked me how to put a new fabric on the market.

He walked into my shop with a small and unusual piece of brocade in his pocket. "Where did you get that?" I asked.

"We made it all ourselves," he said. "We had the idea and worked it out."

"I didn't know there were any machines for making that sort of thing in America," said I, under the shadow of the French legend.

"We've got plenty of them," he said. "We make a lot of stuff for the French manufacturers here. You know, copy their materials for them so they don't have to pay duty."

"Really?"

"Sure. Nobody ever questioned it while the old man was running the business. But now the boys have come in. They keep saying we ought to put the stuff on the market ourselves. We took this piece of material to one of the French houses and showed it to them. They offered to take all we could make."

"Well, why don't you sell it to them?"

"We asked them what they'd resell it for and they said \$7.50 a yard. We could sell it for \$4.00, but we'd be undercutting their trade. The boys think we ought to do something about it anyway."

"Why don't you?"

"We don't know how to start."

"The first thing you do is sell some to Hattie Carnegie or Bergdorf. You can charge them five or six dollars if you want. We can't buy anything like that less than seven. Then, after they've used it a season, you'll have a little press on it. Arrange to get it into *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar*. See that some well-dressed women get circulating around in it where they'll be seen." I ran through the French system for him. He began to look a little depressed.

"We won't get any volume that way," he said.

"No, but don't you see, after the first season when the wholesalers have become acquainted with the material, you'll be able to sell it to them. You can drop the price for

them since they'll use more. That's how you have to go about putting across a new fabric."

"It'll take an awful long time," he sighed.

"Six months to a year," I agreed.

"And then someone will copy it," he said.

Then someone would copy it, I knew too. We looked bitterly at one another and reflected on our great competitive system. "Can't you register it?" I asked.

"You can register a print but you can't register a weave," he said. "I guess we better sell it to the French."

You can register a print design and sue anyone who copies it. It works fairly satisfactorily, although even that game can be beaten. No satisfactory system for registering a weave has yet been developed.

Occasionally an American fabric man goes to France and gets a sample length of a print which he rushes back to America and registers as his design before the French have gotten it registered here for themselves.

The dress fabric business is a worthy base for the American dress business. It ekes out a rather unprofitable existence in a parasitical way. It begins by stealing ideas and then competes with itself like mad on the question of price. It runs hither and thither to avoid the unions. It goes into bankruptcy. It begins over again. Because there are too many manufacturers in it, the chance for existence lies in finding some way to beat the game, put your competitor out of business, undersell him.

Often it seems a pity the manufacturers can't take a tip from those hated unions, "In unity there is strength." Of course, they try to get together, but that extra little dollar they might make by being lone wolves always throws their mutual benefit societies out of whack.

The mill heads of Marshall Field aren't going to lose five

cents a yard by coöperating with the retail store of Marshall Field. Meanwhile, none of them are going to bother paying the rent for Hawes Inc. because its services are not required. One steals what one can, and buys only the rest.

At any rate, I said to myself after the Marshall Field fabric lesson, it only took me two days to find out I have to rely mostly on myself if I want to be a couturière in America.

But, you see, the overhead at 67th Street was still too big to be covered by the customers' orders at prices they could afford. Everywhere from \$125 to \$350, my prices were. Every season, my sales went up 25%, regular like clockwork, every season I lost less money.

I thought to expand the sales a little by carrying a few more things and that is the way I got into the knitting business.

I have always loved and admired and worn simple, well-made English sweaters. I get bored with the colors but I never get tired of the shapes and the softness.

It didn't occur to me that such sweaters were not made in the United States. I wanted to get some to sell at Hawes Inc. in the colors I chose. I found there were none to be had. So I said, okay, I will have some made. In my quest for a maker, I was hired for a knitting job.

As far as the actual job went, suffice it to say that I couldn't run a knitting machine, but from the little I saw nobody has ever half exploited that bit of steel. Knitted clothes are usually a horror to behold with their drooping behinds. They're comfortable and they sell in spite of their bagginess. They can actually fit because of the stretch. Someday—oh some day, some real designer is going to spend a few years with a knitting machine and turn out something thoroughly satisfactory in mass production.

In the meantime, we have no time for experimenting,

no free time, I mean. We are in business to make money. I was hired to produce something new in the way of sweaters, although their basic shape had already been perfected as far as I could tell.

I got Miss Dodge, my old classmate and the warden of Vassar, to collect a group of what she considered the best sweater girls on the campus to consider the matter of something new in sweaters with me. I traveled to Poughkeepsie to consult with them. They were a very attractive set of girls. As I looked them over, I perceived that they had all gotten themselves up in honor of the occasion.

One had on a white turtle-necked sweater. Another wore a red sweater with a small round neck. A third had on a crew-necked Brooks model. And the fourth and the fifth and the sixth had on different colors of the same models.

"How do you like your sweaters?" I asked.

"We love them," they responded all at once.

"Can you think of any improvements that could be made?" I inquired.

"No!" they asserted firmly.

I tried for an hour and a half to make them tell me something they would like to have in the way of a sweater, something new, something different. There wasn't a thing they wanted. They wore sweaters nine-tenths of the time and they were perfectly satisfied.

They would only concede that possibly there might be other and more exciting colors from time to time. I left them. I had discovered exactly what I feared. Sweaters were quite satisfactory.

The only thing I could think of to help them out was to make a sweater that was knitted to button in back. They were all wearing their Brooks coat-sweaters back-side-to and had great gaps over their fannies. I tried to make my knitter

do a double-fanned sweater, so it would cross and button securely over the tail in the rear. He thought I was mad. Maybe I was.

Anyway he shortly pointed out to me that there was no sense of his paying me money to tell him to make a sweater with a two-and-two rib instead of no rib, or to rib it up to the breasts instead of just to the waist. He wanted me to revolutionize the sweater industry.

What I wanted him to do was make classic sweaters in wonderful colors. Far from doing that, I spent most of my time telling him what I'd told Nibs. His knitted things didn't *fit*. "There isn't any use of my designing anything for you until you can make the sizes right," I'd shout.

I got out six size fourteen skirts one day and showed him that not one of them measured the same in any particular. He just said, "Design something *new*. I have a production man. You are a *designer*."

Over and over again, the wholesale trade's idea of a designer is some mythical and impractical creature who turns out something *new* under any and all circumstances, regardless of fit. The knitter paid me \$100 a week and wouldn't even listen to the simple facts of life which I could explain even if I had become convinced that sweaters didn't need designing.

As Brooks Bros. have been quietly proving for the last twenty years, the sweater business doesn't need to be revolutionized. It just needs a new color and a new weave from time to time, and even that isn't vital. Brooks Bros. have been taking the entire output of a number of mills in Scotland for decades.

Brooks Bros. aren't even mentioned in the fashion world. They are considered quite, quite unimportant. Fashion has not been able to persuade them to give up something

good for the doubtful added profits on something different.

Nor has fashion been able to persuade thousands of college girls, as freshmen or graduates, that there is any point in buying anything but a perfectly simple and functional sweater.

All of these little excavations of mine in the mass production world began to have meaning and by the spring of 1935, I saw the bones of that world laid bare.

21 . *A Lucky Strike*



IN THE spring of 1935 there happened a lucky accident which paid almost all my rent for over a year and a half. The accident was due to two things.

The first thing was the result of having made a few friends for myself during my Seventh Avenue experiences.

One of them was a shop named Dewees in Philadelphia. Dewees didn't sell any quantity of Hawes clothes but they made a fuss about them for promotion's sake, and were pleasant people.

When I stopped doing wholesale, they expressed their regret. I didn't want to let them down. I therefore contracted to do a few accessories for them so that they could continue to advertise my name. Among other things which I gave them in the spring of 1935 was a glove which buttoned on the back.

They put me in touch with a wholesale glove man and I made a rather loose arrangement with him whereby he was probably to give me a royalty if the glove happened to sell to other stores. We had nothing in writing. I gave him two or three glove models and forgot the entire transaction.

In the meantime, the other half of the accident was taking place. The Lucky Strike advertising was managed by the firm of Lord and Thomas. The method of getting pictures for the ads was to take dozens of them and then throw away those and take another dozen until finally one appeared which pleased the agency and the advertiser.

Because a friend of mine worked there, they took pictures of my clothes from time to time. I was never particularly keen on the idea because I don't think ladies who wear Hawes clothes care to see those clothes in cigarette advertising. However, mostly in the spirit of friendship and because my friend kept assuring me that some day something would come of it—just what, I never knew—I lent Lord and Thomas things to photograph.

In November, 1934, they took a pink suede jacket and a pair of pink suede gloves to match it. The gloves had originally been the idea of my hat designer. She had designed a pair for herself and had them made in England in the '20's.

In 1931, when we were first beginning to dabble with

accessories, she brought in this very simple glove. It resembled in every way the usual one button glove except for one fact: it buttoned on the *back* of the wrist instead of the front.

I liked it and we had a pair made up in red suede which clinched the idea. Colored gloves didn't exist in those days.

We always kept a sample on hand and took a few orders every season. By 1934, I saw no reason why the Lucky Strike people shouldn't use the glove if they liked. I figured it was no more use to us. And the photograph would probably never be used. It was this same glove which I gave to Dewees via Mr. Postman, the glove manufacturer.

Suddenly in April, my friend at Lord and Thomas called me up and said, "Do something quickly. Your glove is coming out in the May Lucky Strike ads and you must merchandise it at once."

The reason she wanted it merchandised was because maybe you once heard of a Camel Hat. Maybe you heard of the Lucky Strike Glove. When something is put on the market which appears simultaneously in a cigarette ad, the cigarette gets a lot of extra advertising free. The stores are apt to hop onto the merchandise for promotion because it is already on the backs of half the magazines in the United States.

I have become progressively lazy where mass merchandising of Hawes articles is concerned. Usually when the smoke has cleared away, I find I've made \$45.50 on a royalty and it isn't worth the effort. Had it not been that the glove was already manufactured by Postman, I'd probably never have even called up anyone.

But I did call Postman up and explained all to him. The lady from Lord and Thomas also explained all to him and gave him reprints of the ad which was to appear and

lots of good advice. It was a wonderful picture of the glove, that ad. The whole center of the picture was one hand with a back-buttoned pink suede glove holding a cigarette.

The most remarkable part of this story is that Mr. Postman never tried to trip me up for one single instant. He had the glove and I had no contract with him. He proceeded to make one with me, giving me a five percent royalty. He promoted the glove to the stores, which were delighted. It is not often a glove department has anything particular to attract the public attention. One of the stores which bought it sent for their first gloves by airplane.

Mr. Postman, although a quiet man, knew his business. He wasn't particularly used to promotions but he just used his head. He had something and he knew it. He gave a preference of just two days to one store in every town so that they could break the news that they had the glove exclusively, the Elizabeth Hawes "Guardman" glove, as seen in the Lucky Strike ad. After two days, the glove was released to any other stores which Postman saw fit to sell.

We all went to town, on that old glove which had come out of England five years before. For years and years there hadn't been a ladies' glove which buttoned on the back. Maybe there never had.

I retained the rights to the glove exclusively for Hawes Inc. in New York for a very simple reason. We were selling the glove in suede, hand-made, for \$12.50. It cost us \$6 and we took our usual mark-up to cover the overhead.

Mr. Postman put out the glove in cotton to retail for \$1.95. This was probably the most expensive cotton glove that had appeared for years. Mr. Postman figured he must use an expensive imported cotton fabric in order to make it look like the suede in the picture. He also said that suede

gloves did not sell in the spring. He also said he could always cut the price later.

He pleaded with me to release the glove for New York. I just sat down and figured out that for every pair I sold handmade at \$12.50, I made \$6 toward the rent. If I let out the cheap version in New York, I couldn't continue to sell my version. I would make \$6 on every seventy-two pairs sold in New York on my five percent royalty. I stuck to my point. Finally I released the glove in the summer after my season was over and it was still good enough news for Lord and Taylor to run an ad saying they had it.

From May to November, I garnered in from \$500 to \$700 a month on royalties from this glove. I thought it was one of the greatest jokes of all time. Mr. Postman decided it would be a good idea to make me an employe.

Usually I negotiate all my contracts myself. I know I lose money that way, but I feel better about it. This time I left the negotiations to my manager. The pleasant young man who had helped me to electrify the wholesale dress world and move into 67th Street had left. I had a very tough guy for manager during 1935. I was trying this and that to see how one made expensive couturière houses pay their way.

The tough guy made a contract for me to design gloves for Postman for \$500 a month for one year. I dropped open my mouth when he told me but I figured Mr. Postman must know his business. If I had been on hand at the time the arrangements were made, I would probably have pointed out that it is only once every decade that a break like the Guardsman glove occurs.

A glove is a small thing. It goes onto a certain definite object called a hand for the purpose of covering it and keeping it warm or clean. There are not very many things one can do to the small covering in question. The hand must be

able to move in the glove. A shape has been devised so that this is possible when the leather or fabric used in the glove is stretchy enough.

The most satisfactory glove has already been designed. It is a simple pull-on. It may button at the wrist to give a slim look. It usually has little lines on the back because it is assumed that ladies want their hands to look long and thin.

A glove designer can play around all she likes trying to make a new glove. A majority of the gloves sold will remain the basic version. This is not only the experience of Mr. Postman, for whom I worked, but of several other glove manufacturers whom he specifically asked. All of them reported that what they call classic gloves always outsold any other type of glove they showed.

The glove designer's lot is, therefore, not a happy one. As a glove designer, if you aren't going to perpetrate a horror, your designing must consist in simply doing something slightly more amusing with the perfected form of a glove.

As anyone can see, most glove designers are engaged in ruining the basic shape of their article by blurring it with God knows what in the way of trimming and cutting and sewing. This is the result of the vast endeavor on the part of the manufacturer to meet the demand of the department store for "something new." That the public makes no such demand is amply proven in the case of gloves. The public wants good simple gloves. And for the most part they buy good simple gloves.

The fact that we buttoned the glove on the back gave the public something just a spot different to buy. It in no way interfered with the function or simplicity of the glove.

Mr. Postman was a very wise man in some ways. He never harassed us for more and more designs. He said to just go ahead and send along something when we had an

idea. This was the millennium in outside jobs for Hawes Inc. Mr. Postman had a glove designer at the factory in Gloversville who sat all day every day making new kinds of trimming and stitching and edging and tucking and lacing and gloves which few human beings would ever *really* want.

Of course, they sold in a small way because women go and look for new gloves and often make the mistake of buying something rather fancy which they afterwards regret. Ninety percent of the effort in designing new gloves is lost.

One of the bad points about Mr. Postman's arrangements with me was that, in a world of promotion, he spent money to get a name and something to promote and then he didn't spend another cent to promote it.

I do not mean to say that in a sane world, any of this would be necessary. In a sane world, Mr. Postman, who makes as good gloves as can be bought, would continue to make the same gloves year after year, of good quality at a fair price. He would probably hire someone like me to give him ten new ideas a year. Those ten ideas would be culled from the forty or fifty that three or four ingenious Hawes employes produced without too great an effort. If we didn't have more than three decent thoughts on gloves, then Mr. Postman would be content with those and so would the public.

Some of the ideas would be as startling as just buttoning a short glove with an old-fashioned underclothes button. We did that at Hawes Inc. last year and everybody loved it because they were just tired of looking at pearl buttons on their wrists.

When you boil the business of changing style and fashion down to gloves, it becomes almost too clear. You see that there is a basic shape you have to cover and an anatomical way of doing it. You see that the public likes a little change

from time to time and that they can be satisfied quite simply.

You see that the *style* of the glove remains fundamentally the same because it is functional. You perceive how slight is the demand for changing *fashion* in your glove, how it is mostly a matter of amusement.

And you find Fashion kicking up a great fuss about trying to make everything different all the time. Through his advertising departments Fashion decrees that gloves must be all colors of the rainbow one year, that they will be all plain white the next, that this season they are to have cuffs and next season they will have six buttons.

As soon as one gets into any field in wearing apparel where a fundamental functional form has been achieved, the fussing and fuming of Fashion become startlingly apparent. Oddly and satisfactorily enough, they also become of little account. Their great aim of constant change is stopped short.

The public, in a dumb way, just insist on having what they want once they have been able to find it. They stick to it until something really better crosses their path. Fashion may flaunt a million fancy gloves in their faces, the majority of women just calmly buy the most satisfactory type however old it may be.

Just as this is the case with gloves, so it has proven with sweaters. If a fundamentally satisfactory way had been developed for making clothes in mass production, Fashion would be far less successful in changing women's clothing every six months. Fashion is not very successful in changing women's sport clothes, including sweaters. Sport clothes approach complete comfort and satisfaction. They are sleeveless, or short sleeved, loose and, may I say, "ill-fitted" according to the ideas of fit which other types of women's clothes try to reach. The nearer that women's sport clothes

get to being simple affairs of shirts and shorts, slacks, or flaring skirts, the less yearly change can be found in them.

What is the fundamental weakness in other types of women's clothing? Leave aside for the time being the ideas on changing fashion, together with questions of style, are most ready-made clothes actually comfortable? Do they fit? Can they be "sized" right?

I say no, not as they are now conceived and designed.

There are no size 14 women in the world, nor are there any size 16. There is no wholesale dress which fits any woman who buys it. No two women in the world have the same proportions, width of shoulder, length of arm, height of waist.

The great majority of women in the United States, never having had their clothes made to fit them, have not the faintest idea what it is to be really comfortable in clothes, with the exception of sweaters which stretch and fit automatically and some sport clothes. Any dress which is made to a size catches you somewhere, in the ribs because the waistline is too high, across the back because the back is too narrow, under the arm where the armhole is too small.

Wholesale clothes are all designed to be made to order. It is during the fittings of the type of clothes still being worn by all women that the waist is put in the right place, so you can breathe, the shoulder is made the right width so the sleeve doesn't drag and pull, the sleeve is made long enough for you, the neckline cut out enough for your neck. Once a dress has been cut and entirely sewed up with no material left in any seam, it is absolutely impossible ever to take it to pieces and really make it fit any special woman.

The vast majority of American women are uncomfortable in their clothes whether they know it or not. A good

many of them know they can't get wholesale clothes to come anywhere near fitting.

How can this be otherwise when the basis of all American designing has for generations been the clothes of the French couturiers? Of their methods and reasons for designing, I have already said enough. The whole French couture, I repeat, is based on crafts, on making designs to order.

The American couture, to which I inadvertently appointed myself a pioneer, is based on the same methods. This kind of designing has no application of any kind to machine production.

Even the spirit of a large majority of the actual designs has no application to machine production. Machine production is in masses and should be for masses. It must be conceived in relation to the actual lives of the people who are going to wear it and not in relation to a group of women who lead lives of leisure.

How much advertising space is devoted to showing clothes designed especially for the working girl? A little, but a very little. And how satisfactory are the clothes which the working girl can buy for her price? The girl who wants to look neat in her office is faced, year in year out, with a little black or navy blue dress with the traditional white collar. Neat, to be sure—when she leaves home in the morning. Neat, that is, if she has time and energy to press it every night.

The stuff of her dress is a mass of wrinkles over her fanny since she sits hour after hour before her typewriter. The back of the dress suffers likewise if she leans against her chair for any period. The dress will be neat if she can afford to have it cleaned often enough, for the dress seldom is washable. And with all of this, the typical office dress is a deadly

bore, an unglorified uniform which adds little to the spice of life.

The clothes designers of the future, the American Designers if you like, will find some way of solving these problems of neatness and cleanliness and a fundamental human desire to look attractive. These designers will also find some way of designing clothes that must fit, so that they have no specific demarcation line to emphasize the varying widths of shoulders, so that they must, by virtue of the basic design, hug into any size waist.

The basic design of something is what you have left after all the meringue has been scraped off. If it's a good basic design, it is functional. So, the design of an untrimmed, pull-on glove is the base for all glove design at the moment. It is a simple, functional covering for the hand.

The Hoover apron, that simple tie-around affair, originally blue cotton with a white collar, is a basic design. It is thoroughly functional when used as an apron. It is not functional as a dress because it only wraps across the front and so can fly open when you walk in it.

The basic design of most wholesale dresses, the reason that manufacturers can do nearly a whole "line" on one pattern, is a simple affair. The whole garment is cut straight up and down the material. The skirt is two straight pieces with seams on either side. Pleats may be inserted at various spots, godets may be set in. The base of the skirt remains the same. The waist is attached to the skirt in the waistline (wherever that is) and has darts below the bust to give room above. There are two darts on the shoulder to give room below. There is an armhole into which is set a straight sleeve. Fullness may be inserted into the sleeve, the neck may be left high or cut low in any one of many shapes. A collar may be

added; or a bow, or a clip, or a belt. The basic pattern remains the same.

As I have said, it is in the fitting of even this simplest type of basic present-day dress pattern to the individual that all allowances are made for variations in physical structure. And if I have not made it plain that such a design cannot really fit without being made to order, then you will have to have one made for yourself to convince you!

When I say that mass-produced clothes should be designed on basic patterns which can be made by machine, I mean that either we must not try to have them fit as custom-made clothes fit or we must have materials to make them of which do not now exist.

We may perhaps have dresses which are quite full and blousy, gathered in at the waist, which must not be cut in the garment, by a belt or sash of some kind. The shoulder and sleeve must not try to fit tightly but must cover the shoulder and arm comfortably and loosely.

The Japanese kimono is a basic design of this sort. It is not, however, a thoroughly functional design for our more active Western pursuits. The Hoover apron is made on the same wrap-around principle.

I cannot say exactly how mass-produced clothes should be cut because I only know that they are wrong. I have full confidence that some designer or designers, working unhampered by any fashionable legends, will develop something about which I have so far had only time to think.

To make possible the designing of clothes which fit, the fabric manufacturers will have to become American fabric manufacturers, or machine manufacturers. They must create materials which stretch, perhaps only in certain places. There is already a tiny beginning of that in Lastex.

Probably I am being far too unimaginative. Probably

the clothes designer of the future will design a mold into which will be poured some substance which will solidify into a finished garment.

Undoubtedly even before that we will have delightful paper underclothes which can be worn and thrown out after being bought by the gross at Woolworth's. And paper other clothes for hot summer days. Insulated overcoats will be nice because they won't weigh anything.

I would not be doing justice to the future of clothes if I did not point out that practically all psychologists who have bothered to consider the subject agree that eventually we will all become nudists.

The time, money, and energy spent on dressing will be directed toward the desirable end of being actually, physically beautiful, thereby making us, ourselves, so decorative that it will be quite unnecessary to cover our ugliness with garments of any kind. That basic reason for wearing clothes at all, sex appeal, will shine out all over our healthy skins.

Modesty, another reason for wearing clothes, is already rapidly going by the boards. Most people believe that the final matter of wearing clothes for protection will be washed up by our securing complete control of our physical environment in the matter of heating, cooling, and what-not.

Thus, in the broadest sense of the word, nobody should consider the future of any clothing, for there will be no such animal. Every individual will go about, to quote I. C. Flugel, "distaining the sartorial crutches on which he perilously supported himself during the earlier tottering stages of his march towards a higher culture."

Since I fear we shall all be dead before this highly desirable end of all dress designers is accomplished, I throw the idea into the pot where I'm stewing up other legends.

At any rate, I am away ahead of my story. It was the very

obvious beginning of a return to prosperity which gave me time to have a flight of fancy, in the spring of 1935.

My customers began to order more clothes, the Smith Co., for whom all this time I'd been designing bags, had, to their great chagrin, paid me several thousand dollars in royalties on a much larger gross business than they'd anticipated when we made the contract. This, I assume, must be ascribed to their ability to cut prices. If you recall, they were running an out-of-town non-union shop.

Mr. Postman was beginning to shower me with Lucky Strike royalties. I had time to be theoretically bothered over mass production, since the crafts were beginning to support me to it.

I had time to reflect on the instability of all legends, including the French. I decided to take a long trip.

22 · *Men Might Like Skirts*



LIKE many another questing soul, I wanted to go to the Soviet Union. Just what anyone expects to discover about the progress of socialism by skidding over the outside edge of a foreign country for a few weeks, I don't know. Annually dozens of people seem to discover what they want to and to publish their findings.

Some of them find out it is heaven, others of them discover joyfully that it is hell. Life seems to be a continual combination of the two, the U.S.S.R. being no exception.

I was fortunate in meeting the Soviet Consul in New York before I left and he proposed that I take along some clothes to show in Moscow. I was delighted because I knew I would see more in the U.S.S.R. if I were not just a tourist.

The whole story of my Russian expedition has little place here. Suffice it to say that I was fascinated with looking at a bit of the beginning of something and they were fascinated with looking at my most elaborate and capitalistic clothes.

I found the Soviet clothing industry in a very embryonic stage, just having arrived at the point of covering one hundred and sixty million socialists once. There was little the Russians could teach me about clothes, but one hopeful bit of theory sticks in my mind.

The head of the Dress Trust, a thoroughly intelligent and pleasant lady who in many ways, even physically, resembled Mary Lewis of Best and Co., made this one point quite clear to me. What she said was also backed up by what I saw. The Soviet Dress Trust was basing its efforts as far as possible on a simple fact of life: The public should have what it wants, not what the Dress Trust decides it should want or might want, but what that public declares itself as wanting.

The machinery for discovering wants was still as embryonic as the clothing business. It consisted in public showings of newly designed models for one thing. The audience voted on which dresses pleased them and these models were put into mass production. Another method was filling in blanks in stores, criticizing what existed or asking for what did not exist.

My life in American department stores, except as a cus-

tomers, which is bad enough, has been limited to my jobs in France. I therefore quote a very astute lady named Marion Taylor, then employed by *Vogue* as a merchandising council. Miss Taylor made a speech in Chicago in the spring of 1937 in which she especially stressed one point.

Once, she said, there was a system of "want slips" in department stores. These slips were to be filled out by the salespeople, notifying the buyers of things which the public wanted and which the store was not providing. I gathered that in the course of human events, the use of these slips had fallen into disrepute.

Miss Taylor was telling the merchants present in no uncertain terms that they would do well to revive these slips. "You do not pay enough attention to the wants of your customers," she said.

Her opinion is shared by the head of the personnel section of a large group of department stores. He told me one day that the average department store spent two-thirds of its energy competing with the offerings of other stores rather than simply trying to find out what the customers wanted.

The opinion is likewise shared by a large section of the public. "And when I asked the salesgirl for a coat without fur," say one hundred thousand women, "she just looked at me. 'Madame,' she said with raised eyebrows, 'coats without fur are *not being worn* this season.' What could I do?" What could she do? The Duchess of Windsor was wearing a coat with fur that season and one hundred thousand women could do likewise or go without. The dictates of dear old Fashion come first.

One thing which upset me a good deal in Russia was the dictates of dear old something-or-other were taking a number of Russian gentlemen out of their beautiful and comfortable Russian blouses into the masculine strait-jackets of

our Western civilization. Oh, I know that if you've been beaten down for centuries while wearing a blouse, the first thing you do upon freeing yourself is to cast off the outward signs of slavery. Nevertheless, I consider the rise of uncomfortable men's clothes in the Soviet Union by all odds the most pernicious result of the revolution.

I've always been preoccupied with men's clothes, first because they're comfortable and second because they're uncomfortable, third because they're ugly and fourth because they're handsome. It was men's clothes that paid my fare to Russia.

In the spring of 1935 a young lady turned up in my office from the *American Magazine*. She told me that they had a new color process and that the editor thought it would be amusing to get some women's designer to do sketches of colored, and therefore, original clothes for men, which they could print.

"Fine," I said, "how different can I make them?"

"Well," she said, "the editor is quite broadminded."

I thought she was just offering me what people have a way of thinking is "free publicity" but I am very weak about falling for what I want to do anyway. I wanted to do something about men's clothes. I told her to go back and get it quite straight how many and what kind of things the magazine wanted as I was in a hurry, leaving town in three weeks.

The next day my secretary came to me laughing. "The *American Magazine* just called up," she said. "The girl was quite embarrassed. She forgot to speak to you about 'remuneration.' All they will be able to pay you is \$500. She wants to know whether that will be enough."

It was just enough to make my trip to Russia easy instead of just a bit difficult. I felt as if I'd found the money under

a stone some place. So I set to work to whip up four sketches of men's clothes.

I had already done some research into men's clothes for an article I wrote and threw in the waste basket afterward. I was moved to do a piece one night while hearing a lecture at the New School for Social Research in New York. Frank Lloyd Wright, "modern architect" and functional designer, was expounding on the new world. He was properly attired in a stiff shirt and a black Tuxedo.

Every time he said "modern," his stiff shirt cracked. Every time he said "functional," the shirt rose a little more out of the vest. He'd unconsciously pat it into place again and continue.

I thought of all the architects I'd once made a speech to at their League. Some of them were "old school," neo-Greek, neo-Gothic, nineteenth century in outlook. Some of them were younger in age and equally neo. A few of them were working on reinforced concrete buildings, radio-cities, mass production houses. All of them were properly attired in versions of the evening clothes their fathers and grandfathers had worn before them.

"Fantastic," I murmured, as Frank Lloyd Wright delivered another blast at the dead past. And I began to ask questions at dinner parties.

"Are you comfortable?" I inquired solicitously of a gentleman who had just surreptitiously put his finger into the edge of his collar and wiggled it a bit.

"What?"

"Are you *comfortable* in those clothes?"

"Of course!"

"Really? I thought your collar was cutting into your neck," I said.

"It's an old collar and it's rough on the edge," he ex-

plained. Then he added belligerently. "There is *nothing wrong* with these clothes."

That's where I always had the men. They became furious the minute their clothes were questioned. Fury either took the form of a coldness and a quick get-away or a violent argument. This with the exception of a few men who agreed with me a hundred percent.

The matter of men's evening clothes got me down so that I gave up having people dress when they came to my house for dinner. What parties I give are anything but formal.

However, ladies quite rightly prefer to dress in the evening. Ladies evening clothes are so supple, so comfortable, and can be so alluring.

I found, that once my mind had gotten stiff-shirt conscious, I spent hours after dinner waiting to see which gentleman's shirt would crack first. I will grant them that if the stiff shirt is properly cut and fitted and tied down and the party is one at which one never relaxes but just sits in a straight chair and makes formal talk, the stiff—or stuffed—shirt is the perfect adjunct.

When most of the furniture consists of couches and there aren't enough of those to go around finally, when there is plenty of Scotch and soda and everyone breaks down and begins to chatter, then I always fervently hope that some brave male will just rip off his stiff shirt and let his tummy sink comfortably, his back bend into the curve of his upholstered chair.

When summer comes burning into New York and everything goes informal or out of town, then no man expects to dress for dinner. They come happily in their light wool suits and, as they drink their second cocktail, little drops of perspiration begin to appear here and there.

This is how I developed my second big idea on male garments. "Why don't you take off your coat?"

The male would first look surprised and pleased, then sigh to himself as he said, "I have on suspenders."

"Why don't you wear a belt?"

"My trousers wouldn't hang right," he said first. Later, "Suspenders are more comfortable."

Days of research assured me that suspenders *are* more comfortable. I wouldn't believe it at first. I felt sure it was just the tradition of the pleated trouser. Finally I became quite convinced that having your pants loose around the waist and hung from the shoulder is a lot better than binding yourself in the middle with a leather strap.

That is how I first came to worry about suspenders. They are certainly, by and large, so ugly that I don't know as I would want to expose them in the presence of any lady whose aesthetic regard I valued.

In connection with colors, the main demand of the *American Magazine*, my tactics in questioning were as follows: "What do you like to buy most?"

The inevitable response, after consideration, was "Neckties."

Just to cut things short, I replied, "That's because it's the only thing you wear that has any color in it at all. It's perfect nonsense."

"Color!" They snorted. "Only pansies wear colored clothes."

God help the American male with his background of having to be Masculine. It's practically as all-pervading in his conscious and subconscious as the fashionable lady's desire to be fashionable. In 1935 it was not masculine to wear shirts open at the neck; it was not masculine to wear colors excepting navy, black, brown, gray, and tan; it was

not masculine to wear sandals. It was masculine to wear wool all the year round, stiff shirts in the evening, heavy shoes all summer long. Only a few years before that, it had not been right to wear soft collars at any time.

I turned out my four sketches for the magazine just before I sailed for Russia. My sport clothes were quite routine, sweaters and trousers arranged so they could be worn normally or tucked into the tops of heavy socks if the golf course was wet.

I can find nothing wrong with trousers. They're both comfortable and practical. I prefer to wear them myself when I'm working or otherwise active. I wouldn't recommend them for cases where feminine allure is the main object. At the same time I was doing the *American Magazine* things, it hadn't occurred to me that there were times when males might do well in skirts, too.

I did a business suit for the American with a dentist's blouse shirt and a collarless coat cut in Tuxedo fashion, not to button. No necktie because the shirt was a color, and, anyway, there was no collar, just a straight band. It would be well to obliterate the collars on men's sack coats. They seldom if ever fit. They hunch up when a man sits even if they are cut to fit when he stands. In fact, the well cut coat of a business suit is an idiocy. In order to sit down in it, the man has to unbutton it!

The evening clothes included kummerbunds, soft shirts with bands for collars, colors. Of the colors, in the *American Magazine*, we will not speak. I got samples of the fabrics I would have used for the clothes and gave the colors. The new color process was not very accurate. Also the artist who did the finished sketches for the magazine added bits like navy blue shoes which I had not indicated.

The thing came out in the fall after I had returned. I was

quite shocked at the appearance of the sketches. Not so the entire public. Letters began to roll in from all over the country. "Where can I get that shirt?" "Please, Miss Hawes, do some more clothes for men."

I thought I'd better continue and spent a month trying to line up just five men who would buy themselves suits of my design. I got Tony Williams, the New York tailor, to say he'd make the things up, but my initial mistake was in not deciding then and there to present the men with the clothes. It gave me an inferiority complex in my negotiations.

For instance, there was the *Forum*. Mr. Henry Goddard Leach sent me word, after he saw the *American Magazine* sketches, that he would like me to do an article on the subject. Goody, I thought. I made an appointment to see him.

"Mr. Leach," I said, to a tall gentleman of middle age who stands up very straight and is well built, "If you believe in having more comfortable clothes, will you buy yourself a suit of my design made by a good tailor?"

Mr. Leach looked a little put out.

"I will go farther," I added. "You want an article from me. I will do it for you for nothing if you will buy a suit."

We discussed suits. Mr. Leach was very proud of his shirts which he had made specially of some to-him-wonderful material, a bit of piqué which we girls have been using for shirts for years. Finally I brought him back to the point. Would he wear a Hawes suit?

"Miss Hawes," he said, "I wear anything I please. I don't care what anyone says. But I shall have to see what my wife thinks about this."

I guess his wife did not think well of it. I did him an article but it wasn't "controversial" enough for him. So I dropped that.

Then I nabbed Stanton Griffis, a gentleman from Wall

Street. Since Mr. Griffis had shown so much imagination in his successful business career, which includes not just stocks and bonds but books and the theater, I thought he might humor me. Besides, he is a nice man. That was my trouble with him. I took pity on him.

I got myself invited to the rodeo one night for the express purpose of selling Stanton Griffis a suit. I stuck through thick and thin and saw to it that I got taken home the last of three ladies by quietly forgetting to remind him when we went by 67th Street the first time.

As soon as we had dropped Margaret Case of *Vogue* on upper Park Avenue and Stanton had said, "Twenty-one East Sixty-seventh Street," to the chauffeur, I set to.

"Stanton," I inquired, "will you buy a suit from me?"

"Of course, I will," he answered. (I might have known it was all going too easily.) "I didn't know you were going into the men's business."

I settled back more comfortably in the corner of the car. "I'm not really. Tony Williams will make the clothes. I just want to design them. What color will you have?"

A tension came over Mr. Griffis' body which I could perceive even in the dark and from the other side of the car. "These are not to be just ordinary suits," I remarked.

Mr. Griffis cleared his throat. "I haven't gotten a suit in America in twenty years," he said weakly.

I saw that the greatest innovation I could offer Stanton Griffis was to have an exact copy of his English evening clothes reproduced on Fifth Avenue. "Good night, Stanton," I jumped out of the car in front of my house. "I'll call you up about it."

I checked him off and set to work on Paul Cooley, an attractive young man from Hartford. Paul was most enthusiastic. He has no inhibitions of any kind. He even scared me. He

thought that he'd like a ruffled shirt and I found myself about to tell him that men didn't wear ruffles.

We repaired to Tony Williams in the Squibb Building to talk it all over. Tony, I may add, was a little leery of my scheme. I spent a half hour there and during that time Paul ordered two suits, of Tony's more or less conventional cut. I looked at my watch. It was time to get back to Hawes Inc. Paul was beginning to buy a third suit.

"I have to get along, Paul. I'll do you some sketches and see when you come down next time," I said as I left him to Tony's quiet solicitude.

My tactics were wrong somewhere, I decided, and dropped the whole business of men's clothes for a year while Hawes Inc. began to really flourish in definitely returning prosperity.

I did not forget, however, and in early February of 1937, I decided that life was more flourishing and more easy and I would start in again on my men's clothes.

Now, in the meantime, big things had been happening in the field of men's clothes. Soft, colored, open shirts had become masculine. Dark colored evening clothes had been accepted. The Merchants Tailor's Association had come to life.

They invited me to make a speech to them in December, 1936. Unfortunately, I always retain a childish faith that all aëroplanes fly. I planned to come back from Palm Beach one day to make the speech that night. All aëroplanes do not fly in the winter. So I missed seeing the Association in the flesh. But I see their works in print.

The gentlemen have an idea. It is very simple. It is that men should have more color in their clothes. Perhaps it is even that men should have comfortable clothes. It is certain that men should have *more* clothes. Is that the ugly little head of Fashion I see in the corner?

Did you happen to notice that the best dressed men of America were chosen in 1936? Did you know any of the men chosen? Did you hear them voice their dismay and irritation? Well, relax. They were not so dismayed at heart. Men aren't any different from women after all. Several of the men went right off to their tailors and ordered whole batches of new suits, realizing that they must keep up their public acclaim.

Don't misunderstand me, I see no reason why men should be any different from women about their clothes. There were many many years when men wore silks and satins and pinks and blues and loved it. It is a great puzzlement to me why, when in general the men earn the family budget, it can't be divided equally where the clothing section comes in.

The men are just screaming for a chance to break down and have someone take an interest in their problems. They are so eager for it they mostly all pretend they wouldn't hear of such a thing.

When you talk seriously and alone to a member of the male sex on the matter of his clothing, he becomes quite coherent and, at the same time, is apt to develop all the phobias that most women have about themselves.

I had a serious talk with Tony Williams in February, 1937. I suggested that he and I give a party together to show my clothes and his clothes and that we add to the party some of my men's designs. I then pointed out that I could not go and ask men to buy my clothes for themselves when it was all experimental. I wanted very much to make them clothes that they would like to wear, but whether or not they actually wore them after they got them mustn't be the main concern.

I couldn't ask the men to support me to my experimenting. It was enough to make them my victims. Tony agreed to

sacrifice his time and energy and money to the future and I proceeded to do likewise.

My victims were wonderful. They were willing. In the beginning they were amused. In the end they were entirely coöperative. I selected a dramatic critic, a stage designer, a lawyer, an advertising salesman, a young man-about-town, and a dancer.

The plan was to make them each a suit of my design, details to be agreed upon. They would then appear at a private party where I would show ladies' clothes and Tony some of his men's clothes.

On the basis of my past experience, I invited them all to come separately to talk things over with me, at my house where the conservative element wouldn't set them to buying ordinary suits at once in self-defense. The conversations were marvelous.

One of the gentlemen said that he thought it was a great mistake to consider putting men into gay clothes. Men, he said, were a background for women and should remain in that position. Well—at least in the instance of our party, he had the chance to see what it feels like not to be a background.

Another victim came in very diffidently. "I don't know why you want me to do this," he said. "I'm awfully messy in my clothes."

My eyes fell out of my head. "Everyone says you're probably the neatest man in town," I answered.

"No," he shook his head sadly, "I am not. I have my suits made to order. I go from tailor to tailor. I even have my shirts made to order. Nothing does any good. I am not neat."

Just the old case of the lady who persisted in thinking she had a fanny. It didn't matter that she didn't have one. She *felt* as if she had.

The dancer simply bellowed at me when I phoned him

the first time. He was in the habit of dancing in full evening dress. "There is nothing wrong with the clothes I dance in!" he shouted.

"Why don't you come to lunch?" I asked. I then prepared myself to try and separate him just a tiny little way from black and white and tails.

I suggested, tentatively, that he have a rust suit. This was during the first course. I was wearing a fuchsia sweater. He had red hair. Suddenly, over the dessert, he looked up with a bright eye, "Why couldn't my jacket be that color?" He pointed to my sweater.

"Why, I didn't think . . ." I began. Joy flooded my heart. Nothing could be nicer than red hair and fuchsia, they are so perfectly wonderfully awful together. "Yes, you could if you really want to wear it."

"I'm a dancer," he said assertively. "I can wear anything."

The lawyer was a man after my own heart, one of my oldest friends. He said, "Make me anything you like but don't give me a stiff shirt." I might add that the lawyer was paying off an election bet. He bet me anything I wanted that Roosevelt would not carry New York State in 1936.

I had only a few things on my mind in doing the clothes. I wanted them to be comfortable. I wanted them to be attractive. I wanted to bring suspenders out into the open. Constance Loudon, my assistant, without whom there would not have been any men's clothes because I got the flu in the middle of it all, decided that she wanted to see men in skirts.

"What do you mean, Connie?" I asked, rising feebly from my pillows. "It seems to me trousers are quite satisfactory."

Connie held up a little rough sketch. There was a big strong man in a fine flowing Arabian Nights robe. It was

wonderful. It was made for Tony Williams and was, I think, by all odds the most handsome thing in the show. It made me quite certain, once and for all, that for being alluring, the skirt is the thing and there is no difference between the sexes. It was the kind of a robe Othello probably wore when he was busy killing Desdemona. Nobody has ever thought of Shakespeare's Moor as anything but a full-blooded male.

Men and women are quite different in one thing. That's the way they behave while fitting their clothes. The men are wrong. A few couturiers to relax them, and they would realize their mistake.

Women when they fit, never stand still. They raise their arms and fix their hair when you're trying to get the length of the dress. They reach for a cigarette as you pin in a sleeve. They turn and crane their necks to see who's going by the door while you are arranging the neck line. It makes fitting very difficult but it has its good point. By the time you've fitted a dress on a woman, you know how she stands, walks, moves and what's going to happen to your dress after it leaves the fitting room for public life.

The men simply amazed me at their fittings. The instant they entered the room, they assumed a positively military carriage. In went their chins, back went their shoulders, in went their tummies. And they proceeded to hold it without a breath, without a movement, until the fitting was finished.

The result is, obviously, that the minute they get wearing the clothes in ordinary life, they stand entirely differently and everything falls out of place. The matter of a fitting isn't just the ordinary course of human events to a man. It's a ceremonial occasion.

When the last man had been gotten to his last fitting, which was quite a job because men don't make fitting appointments like women, they just turn up—after they had

finally turned up, for the last times, it was the night of the party.

I may say, I was in a nervous jitter. Showing clothes in Paris and Russia was nothing to what I went through wondering whether the men would finish with this affair we had all started. I did not have them to rehearse or even tell them in advance what I hoped they would do. I just got a lady for each man and told her she was to get her man around the rooms, up and over the platforms. She was not to let him escape except over her dead body.

Then I sent every man a bottle of champagne at six o'clock, and got dressed to receive the guests at ten. Although I did my best to keep the party to the invited number, everyone brought a friend in the inimitable New York fashion. It was quite a jam, but most people prefer a jam in New York.

I didn't see much of the beginning of the show. Six gentlemen appeared, each with a professional model, one pair following the next. The gentlemen wore very elegant and more or less conventional clothes, day and evening, made for them by Tony Williams.

The professional models, like my lady guest stars who were later to get my men's designs over the bumps, had been told not to let any man escape. The only gentleman who decided to escape was Lucius Beebe. He was to appear in a simple burgundy tux of Tony Williams' design, accompanied by a tall and very lovely blonde model who had been faithfully working for me for a couple of years.

When Mr. Beebe arrived at the party, he decided he wouldn't show after all. It seemed to me like one thing too many at the time, but also nothing to get into an argument about. I instructed the model to go out alone when the time came. I then instructed Harry Bull and Gilbert

Seldes, the announcers, to make the proper introduction.

When the blonde model floated out onto the first platform from between the blue satin curtains, Mr. Bull said in a loud clear voice, "This is 'Act of God' without Lucius Beebe." ("Act of God" was the name of the dress.)

Mr. Beebe rose to his feet and joined the act. He then decided that showing in one room was enough and sat down again. The model, preceding him, suddenly became aware of his disappearance, turned around, went back to his chair, took a firm grip on his arm and gracefully dragged him into the front room.

That finished the first act of the show, which was followed by twenty or thirty beautiful girls in beautiful Hawes dresses in the customary fashion show routine. The only dire result of that first act was that an English gentleman who'd been modeling a tasty plaid town suit got into the models' room and insisted on helping the girls. I finally dislodged him by much the same means the model used to get Mr. Beebe to his feet.

It was a very mixed-up evening for me. Little things happened constantly like the English gentleman—and the fact that there kept being no drinks in the gentlemen's dressing room. That "dressing room" consisted of a screen in the basement which was quite inadequate and added nothing to the good nature of my guest stars.

The final formal act of the evening was my lady guest stars and gentlemen guest stars, paired off together, each in an elegant Hawes design. After casting a final look over them in the dressing room, I made a dash up to the top of the stairs and got onto a chair to see how it had all turned out. Just at that moment there was a terrific crash.

"The bar tipped over," I remember remarking to myself. Then a great blast of cold air came up my bare back.

It was a welcome feeling. Something to breathe besides cigarette smoke. But what—? I learned hopefully toward the first platform, deciding the solution of the crash would have to wait until I'd seen the gentlemen do their stuff.

Came the stage designer . . . blue linen, non-crushable linen, trousers, attached with brass rings to the striped suspenders which went over a natural-colored and also non-crushable linen blouse, the blouse zipped up the front with a straight attached collar which could be zipped shut or left open as low as the heat demanded. "Something to work in in town when it's hot that is neat enough to wear for receiving clients. I don't want to have to put on my coat," that's what he wanted—and wanted me to make a coat he could wear with it! I refused to make the coat.

The dramatic critic, a gentleman who thought he wasn't by nature neat, came through the curtains looking very neat and not a little embarrassed, carefully letting his lady have the center of the stage. He wore a green linen tunic, belted and with a zipper up the front, a band around the neck, which could be zipped up or left open. The tunic went with some heavy gray Chinese silk pants which had a Lastex band to hold them on, thus avoiding both the tight belt and the suspender. The whole outfit was planned for wearing in the hot summer. It was just about as light as pajamas.

The advertising salesman was simply clad for dinner at home. He had sailor pants, laced in back, made of light weight, fine wale corduroy, and a sweat shirt of striped upholstery linen. My lawyer's Hawes dinner clothes were of bright dark blue wool. They were conventional as to trouser. The shirt was soft white silk, made like a dentist blouse with a straight band at the neck, buttoned in back, no tie. The vest was diagonal stripes, and the coat collarless and

cut to hang open in front. The lawyer is amply built. He got a terrific amount of applause which he explained to me afterward was just because he knew so many people in the audience but I think it was really because he appeared to be having a perfectly wonderful time.

The young-man-about-town wore black faille trousers which were strapped under his pumps, a salmon-pink faille, double-breasted, waist-length jacket, and a white silk shirt and stock, formal evening clothes and they looked perfectly swell.

Tony Williams appeared in person next, accompanied by his wife in a gray-blue monk's robe, a background for the Arabian Nights house coat. For a brief moment I wondered whether men shouldn't wear skirts all the time. I find they have a great desire to wear togas, incidentally.

The dancer became so vague and artistic during the making of the clothes that I sent a special gentleman to see that he ever came to the party. He kept forgetting his fittings because he was composing a new dance to do at the Plaza (yes, it was Paul Draper). He had tight plum trousers, strapped under his shoe, a short gray-green jacket zipped up the front, a bright pink satin neckerchief which I thought looked lovely with his red hair. (He didn't, I believe, share my passion.)

Underneath the jacket was supposed to be a most important part of Mr. Draper's costume . . . suspenders of rust and fuchsia felt, wide on the shoulder and coming to a point where they joined the trouser . . . and there should have been a blue knitted shirt. However, it all got so rushed that at the last fitting, the blue shirt was a mess and I just gave him my own fuchsia sweater to wear. It fitted—quite tight . . . and was a great deal too short. The general effect was fine to me because I knew what it was supposed to

look like. It must have seemed a touch odd to the audience.

In fact, I often wonder what the whole thing looked like to the audience. I was little tired, but quite pleased, as I saw Mr. Draper abandon his lady and execute a few steps without benefit of tails on his coat. His costume was just a sketch which might or might not ultimately be realized, perfected, by me or someone else.

So with all those men's designs: shots in the dark, embryonic ideas, the suspender exposed and handsome, the extraneous necktie relegated to limbo, the stiff collar nonexistent, the vest used to give a spot of color and some line, thrown out as just an extra article of clothing, silk and cotton and linen for summer, sweat shirts and comfort for dinner.

I don't really know whether any of those coöperative angels who sacrificed themselves to my whims ever wear their clothes. Somehow, it isn't terribly important. The vital thing to me was that I just had a chance to imagine for a few minutes that men's clothes might be *comfortable*—that maybe I wouldn't always have to suffer while men turned their soft necks about in starched, scratchy linen; that some day I'd actually see hundreds and hundreds of men going about the July hot streets of New York in cool linen tunics and silk trousers; that maybe one day the women would relax and enjoy being a background now and then for the gay male birds; that possibly when some masculine creature took it upon himself to throttle me for some real or imaginary sin, instead of looking up and having my last living impression a dull mud-like uniformed being, I'd see wonderful rich colors and hear the heavy swish of rich damask.

My visions as exemplified at the party lasted a short ten minutes. The cold air poured up my back constantly and

the crash rang in my head. I stepped off the chair and descended the stairs.

In the entrance hall I saw a flock of policemen and the Holmes detective, my secretary, who had been checking people in, a couple of surprised looking guests. There I saw my large plate-glass window lying in little pieces on the floor. There was no blood. I waved my hands and smiled a little and everyone slowly melted away into the street. I told the secretary to find the houseman and block up the window. I forgot to ask what had happened.

When I got back upstairs, the guests were rising. Talk, talk, talk. Smoke, Scotch and soda, food, photographers. . .

About an hour later a strange man came up to me, saying, "I'm so sorry. Really, I'm terribly embarrassed. I hope it was insured."

Something I missed happened, I thought. "Oh, yes, I'm sure it was," I answered.

He held up two bandaged fingers. Light dawned. Once I had a new Afghan hound, unused to houses. He sprang full force at the plate-glass window while I held my breath and waited for the crash. The window held.

The gentleman with the two bandaged fingers had been in a hurry to get to the party. He got in through the window.

Parties are like that. Experimenting is like that. You never know until a long time after just what happened. Just what happened . . . to the men's clothes? Just what had happened to my designing bags for the Smith Co.? What was happening to Mr. Postman's gloves? What, now in the spring of 1937, was happening to Hawes Inc.?



23 · *Our Competitive System*



WHAT had happened to Elizabeth Hawes, by the spring of 1937, was that she didn't have one wholesale job left and was thanking God for it. Hawes Inc., because of a reluctantly returning prosperity, had paid back all past debts.

Miss Hawes had her third and apparently thoroughly efficient manager. She was able to raise her salary to nearly half what most people thought she earned. The twenty-five percent yearly increase in sales had continued unabated for three years. Hawes Inc. was paying its way and the manager in question was trying hard to begin laying by enough cash to see it through the next depression! I was not only an American couturière. I was for the moment a solvent one.

And so, in the order in which it occurred, let me check off those wholesale jobs which haven't checked me off in past chapters.

In the summer of 1935, I either dropped or was dropped by the Smith Co. Do you remember that once, long ago in 1932, I had begun to tell the Smith Co., "Not stiff, like cardboard, see? Soft—Soft—SOFT."

When I finally parted with them, three years later, they were beginning to make a few soft bags. I guess they found out it was cheaper.

The story of the Smith Co. is just the old fable of Box, Cox, and Nox. There were once three bag firms, Smith Co., Jones & Co. and Willy's. The backgrounds of the three firms were identical. They all made expensive copies of the same French bags. They all made a living at it. Smith sold his bags to Altman. Jones sold his bags to Best. Willy sold his bags to Lord and Taylor.

Somebody undid a screw in the stock market in 1929 and it all fell down. Smith and Jones and Willy all found they weren't doing enough business to keep alive. Smith, as we have seen, decided to get an American Designer.

Jones decided to go to Connecticut where he could run a non-union shop, wages could be lower, and he could keep on copying French bags but at a cheaper rate. Willy decided

he'd stop buying French models. Going to Paris was expensive and he could steal all the designs he needed.

Smith promoted Elizabeth Hawes bags all over the United States and it looked cheery at first. In 1933 he found, however, that no store wanted to pay him more than \$4.50 wholesale for a bag and his bags were still well made and sold for \$7.50.

Jones found that, although his Connecticut shop was non-union, several other people were making French bags in Connecticut and doing it cheaper. Willy found that he couldn't run a shop in New York profitably even by stealing designs.

All three of them saw that they must now manufacture bags to sell at \$4.50. Smith cheapened down all the Hawes designs until they were merely envelopes. Still he couldn't make any money.

Jones cheapened all his bags in Connecticut, but the union found him there and he had to move to Pennsylvania. So he didn't make any money in 1933.

Willy made a little money in 1933. He moved to Connecticut, became non-union, and continued to steal his designs.

In 1934, Smith Co. decided to move to Connecticut to avoid paying union wages. Jones was safely settled in Pennsylvania. He made a little money. Willy got caught by the union in Connecticut and moved to Pennsylvania, so he lost a little money that year.

When 1935 hove upon the horizon, they all said to themselves, "This year business will be good." So they took a deep breath and made a lot of bags in anticipation of big orders. Anyway, it is cheaper to make a lot of bags at once instead of filling small orders as they come in.

The orders didn't come on the stock they'd made up.

Everyone liked the second lines of bags they showed later in the season. They all closed out their early stock at a loss. They grimly looked out the window. They saw the union coming over the horizon. "Damn it," they said. "How is a man to keep going? Here I am losing money and the union is coming in here to try and make me pay more than \$12 a week! What is more, my employes work 48 weeks in the year."

"But Mr. Smith, Mr. Jones, Willy. That only makes \$576 a year. How would you like to bring up a family on that?"

"Yes, yes, yes. It is a terrible thing. Outrageous of course. I feel terribly sorry for my employes, but what can a man do?"

So Mr. Smith finally became divested of Miss Hawes and took up French designs again. Mr. Jones decided to have a union shop, make expensive bags, and hire Muriel King to design for him. Willy suddenly remembered that he had been an expert bagmaker once and he found that the union wages were \$75 a week. He returned to the bench. There was a scarcity of expert men to make sample bags. He worked 52 weeks and made \$3,900 in 1935. Of course, he wasn't his own boss. He only had to work a 35-hour week.

Unfortunately, not only these three gentlemen were engaged in the bag business, but hundreds of others. All of them went through the same thing. All of them are still going through it. Apparently they will always go through it. Every time a Willy saves up a thousand dollars as an expert sample maker, he sets up for himself. It doesn't take much machinery or overhead to run a bag business.

So sadly enough, after five years of it all, I decided only a miracle resulting in the death of seventy-five per cent of all

American bag businesses would put the Smith Co. in a position to settle on a definite policy and go ahead with it.

One year our conferences would all consist in their explanations of why they must make cheaper bags. The next year we would spend three months wondering whether they had been right. The year after, we decided to have ten expensive bag designs and ten cheap ones. The next day, they thought five expensive ones and fifteen cheap ones would be better. The next day, it was fifteen expensive bags and five cheap ones.

I almost lost my mind. So did my first assistant designer, Dorothy Zabriskie. So did Connie Loudon, my next assistant designer. I felt we should plan the designs for the cheap bags so they would come out cheap to begin with. Otherwise, the Plain Smith just did something to the first bag which cut the cost in half and turned it into a pouch with three pin tucks.

It would be unfair to say the Smith Co. did not care about what the public wanted. They hired me to tell them. Whatever I told them, they suspected of being untrue. I could never prove it because if the idea already existed, there was no use of their making it. We went to the mat on the matter of boxes one spring. They said no. We said yes. After three years, I gave in to them quite easily. I liked them but I got tired of listening to them straighten out their affairs and then unstraighten them.

Repeatedly we urged them to do things, like the boxes, which, sure enough, came out of Paris a few months later. The bag business has its own little Zeitgeist. If you are dealing directly with women, you find yourself having that funny feeling that if you only had boxes this spring instead of bags, they'd all be delighted.

I wanted the Smith Co. to make expensive bags for me to

sell at Hawes Inc., to let me test out my odd notions on my clients at those top prices which special orders cost and which Hawes customers can pay. They said yes, year after year. Then their sample maker never had time to make the special things and as their bags got cheaper they lost interest in making expensive ones.

My arrangement was that any bag design I sold at Hawes Inc. belonged to me for a season. Once or twice when we did get a good bag from them, and began to order, order, order on it, they suddenly lost their self-restraint and made a cheap copy.

Then they would call me down and say, "Look, Miss Hawes. We can make this bag for \$5.50. Yours costs \$12.50. We have just changed the leather and the lining and left out one pleat. It looks about the same." It would look just enough the same to make you sick. "Now, Miss Hawes," they would continue, "we could get an order tomorrow for four dozen of these bags from Best's. You'd make your commission." I worked on a retaining fee and a commission. "You wouldn't stop us from selling it? We haven't made a cent here since 1929."

I always weakened. I don't know to this day whether they made any money or not. After they took the factory out of town to avoid the union, Plain Smith dropped a remark one day which sort of set me thinking. He said, "Of course, we didn't show any profit this season." Then he brightened up, after I had agreed to work a little less for much less money. "I did show a profit on the out-of-town factory, though," he said, as he took up his hat to leave.

Oh, well. I was fond of the Smith brothers. They were like little fish caught in a net, partly of their own weaving mostly just the inevitable result of our great competitive sys-

tem. It had not made very rugged individualists out of the Smiths.

Naturally enough, the most flourishing bag business in New York is Koret. Only a few months ago Mr. Delman of the shoes was showing me around his factory. "Couldn't you make bags?" I asked.

"Golly," he said, "Mr. Goodman (of Bergdorf Goodman) asks me that every day. He says Koret is the only bag man who makes good soft bags. He's becoming so independent nobody can do anything with him."

"And why shouldn't Mr. Koret be independent?" I said to myself. He is a gentleman whom I have never met, but I feel sure he has guts. He built up his business through the depression. He advertised himself, yes. His ads don't lie. He makes as good a bag as you can buy wholesale, I think. The leather is good. The linings are good. The style is generally good. I am not sure whether he copies French bags. If he does, he changes them enough to cut out the competition. He does make bags of his own design.

Probably he was lucky in being able to build from the bottom when times were bad, just as I was. Undoubtedly he is, or he hires, an excellent manager and actually knows ahead of time what bags are going to cost him. Almost no wholesaler knows what it really costs to make anything.

At any rate, Koret started making and kept on making bags of good quality. He didn't dither around much. He wasn't frightened about what he was to design. He must run a union shop and pay a decent wage because he is too well known to escape being caught if he didn't.

Probably he'll go under in the next depression because his overhead will be too big, the depression will be worse, he'll cut his price and his quality. However, I must say, in this day and age, among all the businesses I have touched, of

which bags is only one, it is only the rugged individualist who wins at all. He manages to place himself outside the competitive field in some way, never by price, usually by quality and style. He does not just whirl endlessly on the merry-go-round of wholesale competition.

After Plain Smith made the remark to me about making money on his out-of-town factory, I never had quite my old feeling about the Smith Co. They were caught in a net, yes. They were being successful in escaping the union that year. But I saw that forever and ever they, as indecisive individuals, would be going around and around on the competitive merry-go-round.

The results of our bag designing for the Smiths were far more unsatisfactory to me than to them. I can't—I *can't*—bear badly made things of poor quality. I can't hire assistant designers and send them out month after month to try and deal with manufacturers who are going to break their hearts by leaving all the lines out of the design and making it in another leather.

The Smith Co. contract was just quietly not renewed in July, 1936. By this time they have probably been forced to move from Connecticut to Pennsylvania. They have probably bought French bags and stopped buying them. They may have another American Designer working for them. I wish her joy of it.

I withdrew from my Postman glove job with far greater regret. Mr. Postman's partner didn't believe in promotion of any kind. Mr. P. had been overpaying me in any case. At first I thought I would try to design and promote for him. I thought that in some way I could arrange to promote nice simple designs and made a contract to do just ten gloves for them and to see that they were promoted.

One day when I was talking to a girl about doing the ac-

tual work on the promotion under my aegis, I suddenly got sick of the whole idea. The same old Hoop-la to be gone through once more. Would they advertise, how much would they advertise?

What was she going to be able to get into the papers? Would it all have to be about me and not about the gloves at all? What would the fashion magazines do?

If I want to help Postman promote his gloves, I am faced with two equally inevitable duties. I must make him advertise somewhat in the better fashion magazines or, no matter how good the gloves are, no matter how bright my idea, we will get into the editorial pages not more than once a year, maybe twice, very small. Second, I must think up some bright news stories about gloves so they will be *news* and that either means some silly idea or that I, Hawes, actually take the publicity on my own head and electrify the world with my thoughts on the glove business.

The only electrifying thing I can say about the glove designing is that ninety percent of it is *awful*! I bet Mr. Postman's partner wouldn't appreciate that.

So, in the fall of 1936, I took a leave of absence from Mr. Postman and gloves. I may go back to it because he remains for me the most honest and upstanding individual I have so far met in the wholesale field. I would rather like to make the world know that Mr. Postman makes the best gloves they can buy, because I know that he doesn't lie or cheat on his leather and workmanship.

He is up against that same old devil of competition and more or less forced to be a "fence" for that foul thief Fashion. There is one and only one way of beating those two: turn out a good and individual product and tell the world. Telling the world can be so expensive, one wonders whether it is worth while. Great numbers of one's competitors are busy

cutting things with no seams and using fake leather, saving enough to be able to tell the world anything and having some left over for profit. Slowly, slowly, the individual manufacturer is caught in the net. Almost inevitably he begins to chisel on quality for the purpose of competing on price.

When I ran into the men's field, I thought to myself, here, at least, Fashion is not involved. Here one should be able to turn out a good product at a fair price. Here is not instability and constant change.

The first result of the men's clothing jamboree was a slight pin prick of irritation.

A month after the party, about which there wasn't much press in New York because I did my best to keep my promise and make it private, but about which there was a spread of national press because the A.P. was present, Hart Schaffner and Marx had five people call me and ask me to see them.

I reflected on all the letters I'd gotten after the *American Magazine* sketches. I thought of all the boys pining for Hawes shirts. I was delighted to see Hart S. and M.

A very high-powered gentleman turned up in my office. "We are going to have a Fiftieth Anniversary," he told me. "Yes?"

"We want to show clothes from fifty years ago, clothes of today, and clothes for fifty years from now."

I began to get a gleam. I set my jaw slightly.

"We would like to use your clothes for the latter part," he told me.

"The clothes belong to the gentlemen for whom they were made," I answered, stalling.

"Couldn't you borrow them back?"

"Do you think they're for fifty years from now?"

"Well, we realize that they are very unusual. . . ."

"What are you going to pay me?" I got to that point quickly.

"Oh, we thought it would be good press for you. We can get them into the movies."

"I can get press for myself. Why do you want to get press on things if you think nobody wants them and you can't sell 'em?" I was furious.

"Well, we thought you might like to have them in the movies," he was getting quite austere himself.

"I'm not interested in doing anything merely for the sake of the press and you shouldn't be either. Some of the things could sell, others not. I am not interested in talking about them on any other basis."

"Of course, if that's the way you feel . . . ," he rose.

"That is the way I feel. Goodbye."

I felt sick really. I felt better almost right away because one of my pet things was the tunic I made for the dramatic critic. My finished version was not perfect by any means, but the idea was there, the idea that men could be just as cool and undressed on the summer streets of New York as their wives.

The very next summer, the male tunic began to appear. Not my tunic and none of my doing. But soft knitted shirts shown to be worn outside the trousers. Of course, they could be worn inside. Of course there was no way to hold up the trouser except a belt or any ugly suspender. Still, I felt vindicated.

The little germ of tunics was planted. If Hart S. and M. had felt like investing a few pennies, a few hundred men would have bought tunics in 1936. The next year, a few more men would buy them. Presently many many men would be comfortably clad in the heat.

And out of the men's clothes show came another small experience. Just another ray of light on the clothing business.

First I was having fun with my men's clothes. Then Hart Schaffner and Marx dragged in their promotion idea. Also, the Merchant Tailors, I admit, gave me some pause. But, by and large, I am somehow relying on chance to thwart Fashion in the men's field. Chance in the guise of the spoiled American woman and her over-balanced clothing budget, chance in the shape of the masculine tradition, refusing change stolidly, stupidly.

It is interesting to note that changes in men's style come from the lower classes. I was interested in Hart Schaffner and Marx and the readers of the *American Magazine* because I felt they appealed to a quantity market. Perhaps Sears, Roebuck would be the best bet of all for introducing something new to American men.

In the field of male attire, one realizes very sharply the class distinctions in American life. The women, a majority dressed in mass-produced French interpretations, slide rather easily from top to bottom of the social scale, all dressed more or less alike, mostly all looking for some good man to support them.

The economic foundations of our society are upheld by men. One of the emblems of the upper class male is his "correct" clothing. When a young man achieves a dress suit, then he has reached the top. He can go about without being spotted for an underling. He can, in his opinion, consort with bankers on their own level.

The well-cut sack suit, the neatly buttoned vest, the somber tie, are emblems of success and responsibility in the business world. It will never be, it is not, easy to get upper-class men to shed their birthright in clothes.

It is the prerogative of the working man, the lower class guy, to wear no collar and no tie. He may go without a hat if he likes. He can wear loose, unpleated blue jeans. He can

show his suspenders if he wants. He can go shirtless in the hot summer, the straps of his overalls barely covering his hairy chest.

He is thereby marked "unsuccessful." He is not admitted to the best clubs, nor even allowed to ride up in the elevator of the Squibb Building without a coat. He is hired for whatever wage is necessary in a competitive labor market.

Competing in that labor market, he may, as the saying goes, "have nothing to lose but his chains." By virtue of that fact, in the field of clothing, he has nothing to risk by being comfortable.

His boss will not look askance if he turns up in sandals in the summer. He will not be fired for choosing to wear no collar to work. Through him have come the changes of style of the last few years in men's clothes.

He, the worker, was the first to wear soft, knitted shirts, open at the neck. He has for years worn bright striped sweaters and loud checked suits if he felt like it. The Negroes in Harlem have been wearing wonderful colored suits for years, light blues, bright greens, stripes of orange and rust.

Now the graduates of Yale and Harvard and Oxford are discovering that they, too, can be comfortable in soft shirts, gay in loud plaids and stripes. They are discovering it slowly, gingerly. Their fathers are not interested. Their fathers are interested in maintaining the status quo, correctly clothed for that task.

Anatole France said that if he could have any one book one hundred years after he was dead which would tell him the most about what was going on in the world, he would take a book of fashion. If he were, right now, to examine the clothing of gentlemen and ladies in America, he would find a certain leveling process going on, a drawing together of the upper and lower strata.

This, gentlemen, should give you something to consider before you throw your hats over the posts forever. Presently, if you are not careful, one will not be able to distinguish the boss from the worker.

You may now, Mr. Anatole France, distinguish them by their suspenders. With all the enthusiasm of a child, I decided that suspenders should be brought out into the open.

With all the stubbornness of the artist, I said that suspenders should be an aesthetic delight. With my humanitarian spirit raring to go, I became convinced that suspenders were hygienic and that all men should wear them.

I therefore acquired a job to design suspenders, just after the men's fashion show, in the spring of 1937. I made my contact through a friend. I made a very bad money arrangement because I wanted to do the suspenders. I signed, sealed and delivered myself, my name, and all my promotional possibilities to the Park Suspender Co. for \$500 cash and a small royalty.

One thousand dollars in cash is supposed to be the least that can be involved where the Hawes name is seen in the advertising of any other firm. I bowed my head before this enormous necessity I felt to make the suspender an outdoor and beautiful object.

Before any money changed hands, I went to look over the Park "line." Previous to designing my men's clothes I did a great deal of research in the matter of suspenders. I became firmly convinced that wide suspenders were more comfortable than narrow ones. The narrow suspender cuts the shoulder.

None of the gentlemen to whom I talked had ever worn anything but wide, woven suspenders. They complained that it was very difficult to get nice ones. A number of them got their suspenders by the dozen at 20 cents a pair since these

were no more ugly than the \$2.50 variety and \$5 is a lot for a suspender. If you're particular, of course you have a pair of suspenders for every pair of trousers.

The Park Suspender Co. said that almost all their "braces" sold for \$1.50 but that, as times were getting better, I could make them for \$2.50 if necessary. They could cheapen them later. I agreed to all this. I have no objection to anything being cheap if it's right.

When I looked at the line, they kept showing me elastic suspenders about a half inch wide with clips on the bottom to clip onto the trousers. "What are these?" I asked.

"These are \$1.50," they said.

"I mean, why are they so narrow?"

"That is the width that all men now prefer," they assured me.

"This is contrary to all my research," I answered.

"You have been talking to the wrong people," they told me very firmly.

"Don't these clips tear the trouser?" I asked.

"Never," they answered.

"Is it absolutely necessary to make them all in such ugly colors?"

"Oh, no, we expect you to fix that."

I picked up a pair of the elastic horrors and examined the clip. It was just wide enough to hold the half inch elastic.

"Could you make these clips wider?"

"But of course. Those are narrow because, naturally, it is cheaper to make narrow suspenders."

"Oh, it's cheaper to make narrow suspenders?"

"Naturally."

"Then it isn't that all men want them?"

"All men want narrow suspenders, Miss Hawes."

I decided I'd better do a little more research. Maybe I

had been talking to the wrong men. I searched about until I found some men with narrow suspenders.

"Why have you got on narrow suspenders?" I asked.

"Because that's all we can buy for \$1.50." They said. (They didn't know about the 5 & 10!)

"Do you like elastic suspenders?" I continued.

"Certainly *not*," they answered. "They catch in our shirts and wrinkle them up. They are an invention of the devil. But if you have to wear narrow suspenders, elastic is the only kind that doesn't cut you to pieces."

"How do you like clips on the ends of your braces?"

"They tear our pants," they responded, "but an awful lot of suspenders are made that way now."

"What kind of suspenders would you really like to wear?" I inquired.

"Wide woven suspenders," came back the inevitable answer.

Now, perhaps \$2.50 is the least money for which a wide woven suspender can be made. I doubt it, because there is the 5 & 10, but the Park Co. more or less assured me of it. I had visualized a promotion campaign of Hawes suspenders which would first give the world handsome designs, such that gentlemen would go about tearing off their coats to show off their suspenders.

Next, if such suspenders really had to cost \$2.50, I had an idea that a little straight talking would convince a good many men to spend that vast sum for an article of clothing which they wear every day of their lives, on which a great deal of their comfort is dependent, and which should be extremely durable.

Lovely as it may be to have a pair of suspenders for every suit, it is not a vital necessity. The enormous expenditure of \$5 a year for comfort and beauty in two pairs of

braces ought not to be too much for the great middle class customer.

But, before I ever began my job for Park, I saw that I was undoubtedly beaten, not by Fashion, as in the women's field, but by simple economics. The Park Co. would never let me, even in my best *New Yorker* style, tell the world that narrow suspenders were not what all men wanted and that I knew it and so here were some wide ones.

The Park Co. would insist on quibbling because they wouldn't want to spoil the sale of their narrow elastic suspenders with clips. And what made matters worse, the Park Suspender Co. also manufactured belts. Therefore, it could not be said aloud that suspenders were more comfortable and hygienic than belts, because it might make the belt sales go off.

Therefore the Park Suspender Co., having hired me for however little, to make a big noise about beautiful comfortable suspenders, would simply end by saying in a small voice, "Here are some wide and beautiful and comfortable suspenders which Elizabeth Hawes, that smart young girl, has gotten up to replace all belts. You can buy them if you like them. Of course, we *highly* recommend to you our narrow elastic suspenders which are cheaper. We don't really believe suspenders have to be wide at all, and God knows, we don't care what they look like. What is more, we think belts are wonderful and here are some of the most wonderful ones we ever saw."

I shut my eyes and visualized the Park Suspender Co. trying very hard to make the public swallow all my wide beautiful woven suspenders and all their narrow elastic ones, together with thousands of belts. I saw the Smith Co. gorging up cheap bags and French bags and American bags and expensive bags. There was Mr. Nibs, waving Notatal

silk in my face, and the knitter, hiding his eyes from Brooks sweaters. The Marshall Field Co. was making little piles of old samples to copy. Mr. Postman was trying to escape from an avalanche of back-buttoned gloves.

They were all screaming something at me. Slowly words disentangled themselves:

"WE ARE NOT IN BUSINESS FOR OUR HEALTH."

Then Mary Lewis looked up at me from behind her desk, "Ford makes all his money on Fords, not Lincolns," said Mary Lewis, quietly.

Ray Kraemer bounded up beside her, with a little printed placard which read, "I would not take Bergdorf Goodman for a gift. The way to make money in this town is to manufacture \$3.75s."



A LARGE part of the laughing one did at the old Charlie Chaplin with the funny shoes was to avoid crying over his too human predicaments. Perhaps it is the same instinct which makes me suggest that the easiest way to get out from under Fashion is to laugh him off.

He is only a little man with green gloves who does things up in cellophane wrappers. The mere idea that he had the nerve to suggest "all beautiful clothes change regularly every six months" is enough to put him in his place. He's had his day and practiced his little jokes long enough.

I could cry over the plight of the American manufacturer of women's clothes and accessories—if there weren't something slightly funny in watching them chase their own tails, done up neatly and gasping for breath in Fashion's bright cellophane.

Apparently they can't even see, through the wrapper, that economics today demands that all manufacturers establish some sort of monopoly or continue to go 'round and 'round on the competitive merry-go-round. Year after year they stretch up their hands to catch the gold ring, miss it, fail, start over again.

There are too many taxis on the streets of New York, so none of the drivers make money. There are too many people making hats, so some of them make no money. There are, as you may know, too many people manufacturing bags, and gloves, and dresses, so most of them don't make any money except by cutting corners, covering bad quality with more of Fashion's cellophane.

It is hard, very hard for the manufacturer in the women's field to establish a monopoly. A few of them may succeed by ignoring Fashion completely and steadfastly continuing to make certain classic things, like Brooks Brothers' sweaters.

For the rest, we may hope that when the designers of a machine age grow up, they will help. It seems to me that one day the manufacturers will realize that their businesses would be on much more solid ground if, instead of going in for one big free-for-all competition on price year in and year out, they would get something of their very own to sell.

They would have, of course, to shed the French Legend which leads them up back alleys. They would have to realize that they are producing things in masses for the mass of the American people. They would be forced to find out not what their competitors were doing so much as what some portion of the public wants.

The individual manufacturer would then be in a position to stand on his feet and say, "Here it is, in a good quality at a fair price. It's something you want and need. Buy it because it's right . . . not because it's green or blue, not because Patou showed it last month, not because everyone in New York is wearing it, not because *Vogue* tells you it's chic. Buy it because you'll wear it with pleasure for several years."

That will take designers, well-trained designers who understand about machines and who know what's going on in the lives of the people. Of course, there won't be enough good designers to go around for all the thousands of clothing and accessory manufacturers in the women's field.

But I just toss the idea off the top of my head to some brain trust: Why not make all those manufacturers try to get real designers? Wouldn't that be a handy way of cutting out all those unprofitable marginal businesses?

What if the brain trust continued its work and tore down all Fashion's slogans? "All beautiful clothes are designed in the houses of the French couturiers and all women want them"—"Beautiful clothes change regularly every six months"—"All American women can have beautiful clothes."

What would become of all the fashion writers if things didn't change every few months? They could relax and write about what pleased their fancy, things the public might well be told, what kind of velvet really wears, how much the life

of a chic European has to do with the girls who push typewriters all day every day, how perfectly awful some of those girls look in their satin dresses at nine A.M.

The department stores could institute want slips, even for the public to fill out! They could stock good stable merchandise and hold it until it was cleared out two years later. They wouldn't have to worry about changing fashion, because there wouldn't be any fashion, just style. And style only changes every seven years or so.

Each department store could concentrate on what portion of the public it was going to cater to and in how many fields. The stores which couldn't make up their minds would just go out of business and that would be a big relief.

Mrs. Jones would soon learn that at a certain store she was going to find the type of very un-trimmed clothes she liked and at a price she could afford. Mrs. Smith would go to some other store for her ruffles.

After all, the butt of Fashion's dirtiest jokes is the public. The present American boast, that all women can be beautifully dressed if they choose, has been so clearly stated in so many ways for so long a time, that a large number of American women believe themselves to be beautifully dressed who are actually horrors to behold.

Take those \$10.75 copies of the dresses worn by the Duchess of Windsor in the summer of 1937. You could tell by the look on the faces of the American girls who wore them that they really felt beguiling enough to snatch off a Duke *because* they had a modified silhouette corresponding to that of a Duchess. The actual dress, stinted on material, cheaply imitated as to print design, bad in color and ill-fitting, was a horror to behold.

You may say, if the girl feels like a Duchess, what more do you ask? I say, she looks to me like the worst mass-pro-

duced imitation of a Duchess I can imagine, and it just isn't pretty.

In their franker moments, the fashion promoters are quite apt to candidly admit that many American clothes are not beautiful at all but really *awful*. Upon asking the manufacturer, fashion writer, retail promoter or buyer, who is responsible, the answer comes back fast enough. Either "The public is fickle. It doesn't know what it wants," or, "The public gets what it wants. The public has bad taste."

Fashion has taught his promoters how to pass the buck. Quite a lot of the public has good taste and cannot get what it wants. If the rest of the American public continues to have bad taste, I can scarcely see that it is their fault. The public taste in clothes is formed by what it is exposed to.

If it is candidly admitted by fashion experts that the American public is exposed to a great many perfectly horrid clothes, *why* does this happen? *How* does it happen?

To my mind the responsibility lies not with the public, but with all the branches of the fashion world. And, after observing the whole works for nine years, I can't see that most people are having any fun in the present set-up.

The general public is worried all the time because it either can't get what it wants or can't afford what it wants or doesn't know what it wants. And the fashion world is worried all the time either because it doesn't know what the public wants or can't make the public buy what it should want or is having to go into bankruptcy and start all over.

About the only women who are having any fun dressing themselves are those who can afford couturière prices and so get just what they want. Even some of them are unhappy because they are obsessed with the idea that they should be fashionable instead of just going their own way and being as stylish as the Queen Mother.

In any event, we couturières may do our best to save our customers from the wiles of Fashion, from the latest French model, the newest imitation silk, the dress that is here today and gone tomorrow. With prosperity, we may flourish. With the next depression, we may die.

We have very little to do with life in America. We can only dress our few. We, at the moment, are in the same relation to life as the French couture, which has proven to be a great American press stunt, in relation to mass production.

But whatever relation I, Elizabeth Hawes the couturière, bear to life in America, I am really quite a happy girl. I attribute it all to the fact that, although I am engaged in the clothing business in America, where legends still flourish, where the public worries over whether its skirt is the prescribed length, and the manufacturer worries about how full the skirt is to be, where Fashion is God, I have fun because I am in business for my health, and what is more, I say:

FASHION IS SPINACH.

I know that some members of my trade agree with me and perhaps ultimately a majority of them may arrive at some such conclusion. Fashion may perish one day at the hands of its creators and promoters. If it doesn't pass out of existence in that way, I have a very firm belief something else will transpire.

The American woman has been laboring under an excess of fashion for only a few decades. By and large she has shown herself able to cope with the exigencies of life as the need has arisen. When she felt the time had come to vote, she saw to it that she was permitted.

Eventually she will look inside Fashion's bright cellophane wrapper before she buys the contents. She will seri-

ously consider the quality and the usefulness of the very newest thing, the epitome of all chic, the height of all glamor. She will settle comfortably back in an old sweater and skirt and idly remark to ninety percent of what she sees:

I SAY TO HELL WITH IT.







continued from front flap

on dress markups, and Miss Hawes' colleagues in trade are reported to be running up a little gold lamé rope suitable for lynching purposes."

— LUCIUS BEEBE, *columnist*

"A book of real interest for every woman who buys clothes and every man who pays for them."

— THERESA HELBURN, *director*, Theatre Guild

"Any artist will rouse to Hawes' battle cry. I hate plagiarism no matter where it exists, pirating designs or anything else. Hawes has said something for all of us."

— MCCLELLAND BARCLAY, *illustrator*



Elizabeth Hawes

- 1903. Born in Ridgewood, N. J.
- 1912. At the age of nine sewed her own clothes.
- 1915. At the age of twelve did her first professional dressmaking for a small shop.
- 1921. Entered Vassar. Liked economics. Outside of that, concentrated on clothes. At the end of the second year at Vassar went to Parsons School for Applied Arts.
- 1924. Summer as apprentice at Bergdorf Goodman.
- 1925. Graduated from Vassar and went to Paris to learn clothes designing.
- 1926. Became sketcher for prominent wholesaler and fashion reporter for the *New Yorker*.
- 1927. Became Paris stylist for R. H. Macy.
- 1927. Later — Became stylist for Lord & Taylor.
- 1928. April — Called at Paris *Vogue* office under Main Bocher.
- 1928. May — Took job as designer for Madame Groult.
- 1928. October — Opened shop in New York on 56th Street.
- 1930. First American designer to have an exhibition in Paris.
- 1931. Went into designing of accessories for wholesale manufacturer, in addition to 56th Street Shop.
- 1933. Hawes, Inc., moved to present quarters at 21 East 67th Street.
- 1935. Invited to Russia to exhibit her clothes!
- 1936. First showing of Hawes' new designs for *men's* clothing.
- 1938. *Fashion Is Spinach* published.

Jacket design by Alexey Brodovitch

